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CHAIM NACHMAN BIALIK

POEMS

FROM THE
HEBREW

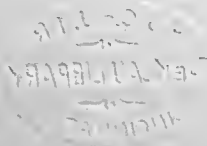
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To the memory of
WOLFE MILLER



NOTE.

I am indebted to Miss Helena Frank, Mrs. Nina Salaman and Mr. Reginald V. Feldman for kind permission to include several of their translations with my own; and to the editors of the following journals, in whose columns most of the poems have appeared, for permission to reprint.

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L. V. S.

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INTRODUCTION.

The usual test of a language's vitality is speech: we call a language "dead" if it is not used in ordinary conversation. This test, however, does not answer in every case. It is questionable, for instance, whether literary Italian had ever been a spoken tongue before the last hundred years: even the educated classes conversed, then, in local dialects, among which the Tuscan speech was almost, but not quite, like the literary language. Nor is modern literary Greek to be heard in any natural conversation; nor is the "misspell Danish" of Ibsen and Hamsun identical with the actual mother-tongue of Norway. It would, therefore, be safer to say that the test of a language's life or death is rather an invisible, impalpable one; it is in the psyche, not on the lips. If a people can feel in a certain tongue, that tongue is alive, no matter whether spoken in drawing-rooms and market-places or not.

"Feel" must be emphasized, for mere "thinking" in a certain language is not enough to proclaim it a living tongue. Medieval Latin was the medium in which everybody thought, but in which no one ever felt. This is why minstrels and troubadours sang in local dialects, leaving it to the doctors to compile and reason in Latin. Poetry, accordingly, is the only fair and sure visible proof of a language's vitality: the little flower which marks the difference between a tree that can still blossom — and a log of timber, useful but dead.

Hebrew ceased to be a spoken tongue 2000 years ago, and was only revived as such in Palestine about the

end of last century. But the tradition of Hebrew poetry has never been interrupted. In the Middle Ages and in our days, in the Orient, in Africa, in Spain, in Lithuania — Israel's way is dotted with names of Hebrew poets; some of them great, others minor, but all of them real poets, men who felt in Hebrew, not only translating their feelings into Hebrew mechanically. The tree was broken, hardly any good as timber, but its gift of blossoming, the test of life, never departed.

Chaim Nachman Bialik, the greatest among the Hebrew poets of to-day, was born in 1872, in a village of South Russia. What really matters of his life — its inward events — will be told along with our short survey of his poetical production; as to the outward facts, they can be compressed into a few words: an early boyhood in the fields and woods, too soon interrupted by the Cheder, and later, by the Veshibah, a strictly theological education, whose gaps the poet had later to fill in by hard reading and self-education; a literary career, successful and brilliant from its very beginning; then, almost suddenly, a relapse into silence — a silence which, by now, has lasted, with but few interruptions, well over ten years; and during this period — hard and useful work in editing and publishing Hebrew literature, ancient and modern, mostly with a view to school-use.

A naive old colour-print, still to be seen in many homes of provincial Russia, represents human life as a trajectory of steps, rising from cradle to maturity and then again descending. As a man, Bialik is still in the prime of his life; as a poet, judging by the few samples he reluctantly gave us during the years of Silence, he is still in the zenith of his powers. But this strange fact of Silence suggests a completed trajectory, and it will be with that idea that we shall review his work and try to unravel its message.

A few words, for the uninitiated reader, on Bialik's Hebrew. It is the language of the Old Testament, unchanged as to grammar, but enormously enriched, as to vocabulary, by additions made during some twenty-five centuries of literary evolution — the Talmud, rabbinical books, medieval philosophy and poetry. The author of the Psalms could understand most of Bialik's poems without difficulty, only asking here and there for the meaning of a single word.

Bialik's metre, in most cases, is the tonic metre, as in English verse, rhymed or blank. Sometimes, however, he returns to the peculiar biblical metre, that of Deborah's song, based not on syllables and accents but on the parallelism of ideas and images.

* * *

Bialik's poetical "trajectory" can be roughly divided into four periods, each one with its distinctive feature: the period of The Complaint — of The Revolt — of Despair — and the period of Silent Work. Each of these periods corresponds to a certain stage in the life of the Eastern Ghetto, to which he belonged and of which he expressed the psychology.

As a poet, Bialik entered life in the early nineties, emerging from the seclusion of an old-world Talmud-school. The Russians have a characteristic name for those drab and cheerless years between 1885—1895 — they call them "Un-time" (Bezvremenyé): a time that had no features, no deed or event, positive or negative, by which it could be remembered in time to come. The atmosphere of the Ghetto was no less dreary. The first enthusiasm of early Zionism had already spent itself; Herzl was still a mere "feuilletoniste" on a Viennese paper; the stern, joyless philosophy of Ahad Ha'am dominated the minds of the élite — but only of the élite. The Ghetto in those days knew neither great tragedies

nor great hopes — it was stagnant like the whole of Russia, perhaps like the whole world.

A few quotations will indicate the impression which that atmosphere made on the young poet. In the "Orphan Song" he compares life to a forest in the shadow of a late northern autumn — the green and the golden leaves all gone, the noble white snow not yet descended from the sky. In another poem of those years, "The lone Star", he launches the first of his curses upon the Ghetto and its life. "My father is Black Poverty, bitter Exile is my mother; but it is not the wanderer's staff, nor the beggar's wallet I fear; for seven times more cruel, more terrible than these is life itself, the life that knows no hope, no radiance, the life of a hungry dog, fettered to its chain — O, curse upon you, Life that knows no hope!"

In this all-pervading squalor the young poet feels morbidly dejected; and perhaps the most characteristic trait of this first period is the insistent, almost irritating recurrence of the word דמעה (the tear) — in practically every poem. Tears are the only form in which pent up feeling can break out and express itself. "You want to know where I have learned my song?" he says in the autobiographical שירתי (My Song) — and tells a story of the cold, poverty-stricken home of his boyhood, where, at nights, the father groaned in his sleep and the mother sighed — and it was that groan and that sigh that gave the rhythm to his song. The tear, so he feels, is his only wealth, the only thing on earth which is his own — the only thing he could not bear to lose. "My tear fell, and a ray of the sun came down and struck it. Cold terror seized my heart; yet another moment — and my tear will be no more! Where shall I turn then, a beggar?..." He conceives a mystical worship for "the Tear" as a real power: in one of the few poems of hope he wrote in those

days he foretells the coming of a prophet — and all that prophet is expected to do is to “shed a tear that shall transpierce the earth.”

There was, for Bialik, but one bright spot in the “dark forest”: “The Book”, and everything connected with “The Book”. He dedicated tender, caressing songs to the shabby and grimy “Beth Hamidrash” where orthodox generations, grandfathers and mere boys, spent their days and nights over volumes of the Talmud and the Kabbala. p. 46 P. 46</

Jewish Ghetto, by a general upheaval of long suppressed forces. In Russia, the first shots of the revolutionary offensive were heard, the first political strikes of 1902 were in preparation; in the Ghetto, those were the days of Herzl's triumph on the one hand, of the revolutionary Bund's first victories on the other. It will ever remain the great riddle of history: is it the poet that influences his time, or is it the epoch that creates the poet? Many an observer shares the view that among the impulses which have determined the Jewish revival since 1896, the personalities of Herzl and Bialik were the two main factors, more powerful than any "objective" event of those days. However that may be, the fact remains that, abreast with the march of events — portending the Jewish renaissance — perhaps in the vanguard, there sounded Bialik's Song of Revolt.

The word Revolt should not in this case be construed as meaning any definite platform of subversive politics. It was much wider — it was a rebellion against every aspect and form of the "life that knows no hope" which the poet had so bitterly cursed.

The three main objects of the Revolt were: return to Nature, triumph of youth and passion, and adoration of primitive, animal, masculine might.

The Ghetto walled itself between the Synagogue, the Market, and the Cemetery, scornfully oblivious of all sensuous enjoyment of fields, woods, streams. Bialik revolts, and it would be difficult to find in other literatures anything comparable to his idolatry of "the Light", of the sun-ray that symbolises Nature's vitality and intoxicating beauty. In *הוֹרֵה* (Radiance) the idolatry becomes almost fetishism: the boy, protagonist of this poem, roams in the field accompanied by myriads of little playmates with whom he races and fights and bathes, — playmates to him as alive, as pal-

pable as human children; but they are not human — they are just צפרירים, moths in the sunbeam, or sunbeams themselves.

The Ghetto shrank from all emotions not connected with religion or with family affections. A microcosm of truncated, mutilated semi-life, it could not tolerate, for self-preservation's sake, such wild and uncontrollable factors as youth running amuck, or passion in any shape or form. Youth was only a transition stage, a portion of human life, imperfect and valueless in itself, appreciated only as a period of training for maturity. Woman was a mother and a housewife; her beauty was a drawback, a disturbing element to be obliterated as soon as possible by such means as the cutting of her hair, the wearing of a wig after marriage. Love was only tolerated as the legitimate outcome of established family connections; as an independent factor bringing man or maid together or driving them apart, it was, if not unknown, assiduously ignored. Against all this Bialik revolts, and his new song brims with a frank and bold erotism. In "The Butterfly" it is an erotism full-blooded, cheerful, passionate; in other poems, especially in the symbolic מגילת האש (Scroll of Fire), it is rather a sad longing for the fulness of youth and passion denied to a child of the Ghetto; but it is rebellion throughout, a call to a new life which knows no barriers.

A step further, and we reach the highest point of the "trajectory". The Ghetto despised physical Manhood, the principle of male power as understood and worshipped by all free peoples in history. Physical courage and physical force were of no use, prowess of the body rather an object of ridicule. The only true heroism the Ghetto acknowledged was that of self-suppression and dogged obedience to the Will above. Bialik revolts, and becomes a singer of triumphant, invincible, rebellious Manhood, of the arm that wields

the sword, of muscles of granite and sinews of steel. "The Dead of the Desert", published in 1902, is certainly the best of his long poems. It is a vision of those rebels — rebels against God and fate — who, according to the Bible, challenged God's own command and Moses' word, and, abandoned by the pillar of fire, went alone to death in battle with the Amalekites. Bialik sees them, asleep for ever in the sands of the desert, a mighty camp of silent warriors; and he clothes the powerful bodies in superhuman magnificence; he summons the lempesl to awaken them, and, when awakened, they sing a hymn of Revolt, a hymn of majestic pride, of unbending will to struggle against man and God.

This tale of mighty ancestors was evidently told in order to stir the descendants by shame. Less than a year passed after the publication of the "Dead of the Desert" — and a tragic event showed, both to the poet and to the crowd, how deep was the gulf between the ancestors and the children. That event was the Kishinev pogrom of Easter 1903.

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The future historian of the Jewish National Movement will certainly recognise those three days of massacre in the Bessarabian capital as marking, in many ways, the birth of a new Jewish mentality. For the first time in modern Jewish history the main feeling provoked in the community was not that of horror and grief. It was something else, some new allitude which as yet had no popular name. Bialik found the name. The most famous of his poems — "In the City of Slaughter", sums up the effect of the massacre in the following words: "Great is the sorrow, and great is THE SHAME, — and which of the two is greater — answer thou O son of Man!"

The main lesson of the pogrom was shame, the humiliation of a people who allow themselves to be beaten and

killed. The indignation vibrating in every line of the poem is not against the murderer — Bialik hardly condescends to mention him, save for a few words of contempt, as if speaking of an irresponsible beast. It is against the Jew himself that the Jew thunders. He descends to the cellar "where your sisters, daughters of your people, were polluted". Here are the dark corners, the flour-barrels "behind which lay their brothers, husbands, lovers, peeping through the holes, and saw the pure and quivering bodies in the embrace of brutes, and never stirred and never moved, nor lost their reason". These are the grandsons of the Maccabeans — "they ran like mice, they hid themselves like bed-bugs, and died the death of dogs wherever found". The grief of such men is not worthy of sympathy, and even their prayers are rejected by God, whom Bialik makes scornfully exclaim: "You beat your breasts, you repeat: we have sinned. . . . Can pieces of clay offend?" And God, humiliated by the cowardice of His chosen people, longs for their curses instead of their prayers — longs to see them rebel against Him if they are too craven to rebel against mortal oppressors, longs to see "their fists threatening Heaven" . . .

The effect of this poem, comparable only to the XXVIIIth chapter of Deuteronomy in the bitterness of its invective, was exceptional; there are few examples in history of a work of real poetry influencing a generation so deeply and so directly. In a way almost mystical, its lesson reached even those who could not read in Hebrew; it reached them only partly through translations, but mainly through that "wireless" influence which can only be described as telepathy of genius. The revival of Maccabean tendencies in the Ghetto really dates from that poem; the self-defence organisations which sprang up everywhere in Russia to meet the new pogrom-wave two years later, the שומרים (Yeomanry) movement in

Palestine, even the Jewish Legion which fought for the Holy Land in 1918 — they are all Bialik's children.

A poet with a less exacting attitude to life might be expected to feel fairly satisfied with such immediate results. Not so Bialik. Average observers, who live in the street and measure by the street's standards, register complacently every small improvement; but there are minds who watch life from a detached and elevated viewpoint, and to whom small changes for the better are only sparks in the darkness, sparks that light up a tiny circle around them and leave the rest as black as before — or blacker. From this attitude, the response to the poet's call to Rebellion was disappointing — at any rate, inadequate in its actual force. The Self-Defence corps in 1905 displayed the greatest heroism, but they proved too weak to stop the murderers, and thousands of Jews were killed in spite of them. Assimilation had long ceased to be an ideal, on the contrary — in the current phraseology it had almost entirely been replaced by Nationalism; but in reality, actual assimilation went on snatching the best forces of the young generation. Zionism held spectacular congresses and counted hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic adherents, and much praise was given to the Jewish colonies in Palestine; but when Bialik visited that country, he saw that the colonies were only few, that the heroic effort of the pioneer fell infinitely short of its goal — the creation of a Jewish Commonwealth — and that generally, in every field of the so-called Jewish Renaissance, superhuman efforts of individuals were able to produce but infinitesimally small results. . . .

From the date of publication of the "City of Slaughter" begins the decline of Bialik's trajectory, the period of "Despair". The most characteristic poem of this period is perhaps דבר (The Word); it voices the poet's feeling that he himself, his Rebellion call, his protest — all were

useless, words, nothing but words. "Break up your altar, O prophet, and scatter its embers, for the mob to cook their mess upon them, or to light their pipes . . . Sweep away the cobwebs in your heart, the cobwebs you took for the strings of a prophet's harp. . . . Break your hammer which has failed to shatter iron hearts — forge it into a spade, and dig a grave for us. . . . Why should we fear Death? its Angel is already riding astride of our back, and his bit is in our mouth — and thus, with hymns of Renaissance and trumpets of triumph, shall we dance on — to the tomb. . . ." This last note — the mocking and dismal discrepancy between the Renaissance phraseology and the actual wane of the race's vitality — is the key to the poet's whole attitude in that period.

He begins to despise himself as one who has prostituted sacred, solemn prayers to no purpose. In the ערבית (Evening Prayer) he gives this bitter resumé of all his life's work: "I went out to seek your farthing — and I lost my own golden sovereign; and Ashmedai, the devil, rises before me and jeers in cruel mockery."

And the poet decides "to go". "I have failed", he says in one of his last poems before the Silence, — "but the guilt is not mine — my hammer has found no anvil, and my axe has fallen upon a decayed trunk. Well, I submit to fate; I shall gather my implements in my belt, and go as I came — a day labourer who has not even earned his hire. Woods shall be my friends, and the valleys my home; and YOU — you are but rust and rot, and the Tempest of to-morrow shall scatter you like dust. . . ."

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With this bitter farewell began the fourth stage of Bialik's trajectory — so far, the last. The less said about a poet's silence the better. Only seldom, during the last twelve years,

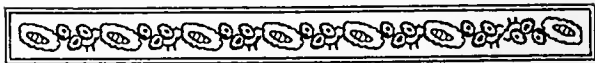
has he published any new poems, and even among these the best one begins with the words: "Let my lot be with those that are silent. . . ."

During the War he delivered a remarkable lecture in Moscow. The subject was: "Agadah and Halachah". Those are the names of the two elements constituting the Talmud: Agadah its poetic element, legends, proverbs, parables, — Halachah its stern philosophy and legislation. The gist of the lecture was: we have all of us been worshippers of the Agadah, dreamers of dreams, who thought we were living in a world of legends. I have made the same mistake. It is time for us to awake. There is no room yet in our life for Agadic vagaries — and we need no poets. This is the time of the Halachah of drab realities, of prosaic thought and work.

Early in 1923, Bialik's fiftieth anniversary was celebrated throughout the Jewish diaspora. He refused to be present at any of those functions; his only answer to the flood of enthusiastic greetings from every corner of the earth was a short poem in which the same refrain of renunciation is repeated: "I am not a poet nor a prophet, I am a hewer of wood. . . ."

The name we have given to this period is Silent Work. Bialik is not only a gifted poet, he is also a great worker. In his despair, he did not turn his back on his people, nor even upon its Renaissance movement: he still works for it, but no longer in the rôle of a prophet who leads: he simply plays the part of an ordinary toiler who executes. His remarkable activity as editor and publisher of classical and school literature in Hebrew need not be reviewed in an essay dedicated to the poet; as to the poet's story, for the moment it is told.

V. J.



משירי קיץ

A Summer Song.

Weary am I of the sad, spoilt summer!
Noonday and midnight the changeless sound
Filling my ears of the splash of the rain
Falling in sheets on the soaked, sodden ground.
Rain that beats on the thatch overhead,
Rain that taps, taps, taps at the window,
Seems it would show me the grey world around,
Seems, it would drive me to wish myself dead.
Yonder there lies th'unharvested cornfield,
Wails for the sickle in vain,
Lower and lower where runs the long furrow
Bent with the weight of the grain.
Heavy with fruitage, the trees in the orchard
Groan as if tortured,
Overladen, with straining boughs,
While from the branches, never stopping,
Long, long tears are slowly dropping
Down to the earth . . .
I know the rain is good,
And fraught with blessing for the thirsty land:
Anon 'twill call the reaper to the field
And fill the barn with food.
For man and beast — it brings down bread from heaven,
The gift of God flung broadcast from his hand,
As in reward for toil;

That little tender shoots below the soil,
Deep, deep below,
Do nestle to the rain with sucking lips
Like infants to the mother's breast. I know
There's many a parched thing
That waits for the fulfilment which the rain
Alone can bring.
I know, full soon the sun will shine again
And touch the apple's cheek with deeper red,
And every labour of our hands repay.
I know its friend — and yet I grieve to lose
One moment of the summer, brief at best,
To see her petals fall, untimely shed,
And all sweet hues and odours washed away.

1906

Helena Frank.

הקיץ גורע

Summer is dying, woven in fine gold,
Couched on a purple bed
Of falling garden leaves and twilight clouds
That lave their hearts in red.

The garden is deserted, save where a youth
Saunters, or a maiden walks,
Casting an eye and a sigh after the flight
Of the last and lingering storks.

The heart is orphaned. — Soon a rainy day
Will softly tap the pane.
Look to your boots; patch up your coat. Go, fetch
The potatoes in again.

1906

2

משירי החרף

To the Frost.

Grasp and grip me at thy will,
Bite me, singe me, scorch me, thrill.
Freeze my breath's hard-heaving flood,
Pour thine iron to whet my blood.
Be my file and make my strength
Keener than the keen sword's length.
Clamp my breast with iron rigour
Lest it burst with pent-up vigour.
Rave and riot at thy will
Bite me, singe me, scorch me, thrill.
Stretch my sinews, stretch and bend,
Hold my breath confined and penned.
Flash 'midst hoary flakes of light,
Lord it over all with might.

Reginald V. Feldman.

בשורה

Tidings.

A golden arrow shot to earth
With tidings from the sky;
Clear flashed the import of its gleam
"Behold, Spring draweth nigh."
A new light fills the universe,
A swift wind rushes by,
Bearing this message far and wide
"New life is drawing nigh."
The pools have heard and leap for joy
And dance with silver glee,

"Awake, awake to greet new life"
They cry exultantly.
God opens a window in the sky:
"My little cherubs, go,
Spread lthrough the world and from your wings
Lel life and fragrance flow."
"Whence comest thou, swifter than a shaft,
Oh, Swallow blithe and free!
That heraldest from some high roof
The world's festivity?"

II.

The clouds melt into purity
And nimbly urge their flight,
The azure paths of heaven gleam
With fresh-diffused light.
I look towards the sky and lo!
The wall of clouds is rent;
I hold free converse with the clear
And open firmament.
My heart shall be attuned to grasp
Its deepest mystery;
The sky shall fill me with its wealth
Of light and purity.
Upon my head, within my heart
Shall flow that liquid blue,
And thrill me as ambrosial scent
Or drops of quickening dew.
I hear the beat of silver wings,
I feel swift sunbeams dart

Unchaining all the harmonies
That slumber in my heart.
Flit through my frame, sweet elves of light,
Awaken every string,
And with one burst of newborn song
My inmost soul shall sing.

1903.

Reginald V. Feldman.

עֵינֶיהָ

Her Eyes.

Silent and alone she came
In the gloaming and the shade,
As the day shed forth its last
Gold talents, of the sunset made.

Her arms were folded on her breast,
Bright beams of light played on her face,
Fell to her feet; two glorious shafts
Illumined then her eyes with grace.

And as she stood all motionless
Two glowing embers dipped in flame
Were struck as lightning from the forge.
What have these eyes from me to claim?

*

Two basilisks, black as the night,
Have cleft through air their venomous way,
Straight from her eyes into my heart,
Descending there they fix the prey.

They ravage fearless, vomit gall,
Breathing fire-flame to consume;
Save me, heaven, save me now,
From a self-engendered tomb!

*

Now has she passed from out my sight,
With hidden steps she walks apart,
But her eyes are still a torment,
And the Death is in my heart.

1892

בשל תפוח

The Apple's Fault.

Would you know how Love first came
And through an apple shot its aim?
For 'tis agreed one never knows
Where and where the spirit blows;
Now I'll answer to my name
And tell you how my love first came,
The fault of an old apple tree.

My uncle had a garden fair
A daughter too of beauty rare;
And in the garden was a spring
Flowing softly, slow and clear
As stolen waters, hidden wines
In this paradise which shines, —
A daughter too of beauty rare.

There hidden nooks for quiet ease
Bowered with fruit and stately trees
In the brilliant summer time,

Are fresh with flowers, brimmed with song;
Shafts of light and shadows throng
In hidden nooks for quiet ease
Bowered with fruit and stately trees.

It fell on a midsummer day,
Hot the noontide, bright and gay,
I came into the garden, sporting
With my cousin Pearl, and courling,
She a tender maid and I
A yearless youth, come out to play
All the livelong summer day.

The bowers enrobed in foliage bright
And sunshine rays of joy and light
Conceal a laden apple tree;
Clustered cherries there are shining
With blushing berries all entwining,
In shade of bushes, foliage bright
Where sunshine rays of joy alight.

Voices answer, voices twitter
'Twixt the leaves on wings of song,
Chorus of a babbling twitter
In my heart new measures beat,
Moving chants awake and sweet,
Voices answer, voices twitter
Winged songsters round us flit.

There we laughed and danced in glee —
Pearl is very near to me —
Full of mirth, like children singing;
Those born for song and fruits divine
Mingled in this joy of mine,
As we laughed and danced in glee,
For Pearl is very near to me.

She dubbed me the devil's filly,
A called her a little bird,
Or compared her to a lily —
I can't recall — it's quite absurd!
How lovely at that hour was Pearl
When she dubbed me the devil's filly
And I called her a little bird.

All at once a tree we find,
Apples giving savour sweet;
Swift and lightly as a hind
My dove has glided from my hands
And lifting hers, she strikes and lands
A branch of apples at our feet,
Sending forth its savour sweet.

Back in a moment, holding fast
A brilliant apple big and red;
She tasted it and then she fed
Me with her hand from t'other half;
I oped my mouth wide, not to laugh,
Whilst she stood by me, holding tight
The slice of apple, red and bright.

And where the apple white was seen
My teeth were set where hers had been;
I scented then the charm of Pearl —
Perfumed elixir, souls to sate;
As if drunk with sweetest wine
The spirit melts, the heart is strait;
From then my Pearl was Pearl of mine.

העינים הרעבות

These eyes are famished, and they plead so long,
These lips are thirsty, clamorous to kiss,
These beauties of desire for dalliance,
These hidden love delights like the Abyss
Know not when sated.

And with carnality, riot of joy,
And with flesh sensual, voluptuous,
From pleasure fountains blessed I am cloyed;
Ah! beauty, couldst thou know the languorous
Soul thou hast wearied.

No storm had swept my passions, I was clean,
Till beauty breathed her spirit and defiled
A simple lad, brought pitiless to thy feet –
A perfect heart, a crystal mind, a child
Empty of blossom.

Small moment's boundless happiness was mine,
I blessed the hand that hurt, of sad bliss made,
In that small moment's happy, happy joy
A full world crashed about me – great wealth paid
All for thy flesh!

הלילה ארבתי

At night I watched beneath thy room,
I saw thee, desolate and still,
With eyes confused gaze through the casement,
Seeking thy soul, thine errant will.

Seeking thy love to come again
As in youth, thou didst not see my love,
My soul that strayed in through the casement,
That fluttered like a trembling dove.

רק קו שמש

A lonely sun ray passed thee o'er,
Then wast thou stately to outshine,
For it unlocked thee and delight,
Ripening as a fruitful vine.

At night a lone storm passed thee o'er,
Profaned thy fruit and blossom gay,
And vicious hounds, where lay thy glory,
Scent thy corpse from far away.

בת ישראל

A Daughter of Israel.

Lies in thy crown an empty ouch? —
I have a stone to set;
And if they be all filled I fain
Would add an emerald yet.

I have a gem and Love its name,
Come earn it and 'tis thine,
Take it to crown thy jewels of grace,
And crowning them to shine.

New lustre, on my faith, 'twill bring
For all its fellows too,
For thee and for thy light of life
A multicoloured hue.

The stars will breathe new thoughts to thee
And unknown whispering;
And in thy heart for psalmody
New murmurings shall ring.

By the stars of God I swear to thee
In this rare jewel and bright
No fault soever shalt thou find,
Search it with seven suns' light.

I had a mother — shield of mine —
She taught my heart to keep
Treasures of pleasantness and pearls,
Borne silently and deep.

My mother kindled seven lamps
On Sabbath — sacred night,
And thus for ever slaked my soul
With an humble, holy light.

Receive my heart, what 'tis, I pray ,
Sans auric flames to grace;
A glow of blessing will it bring
From a daughter of our race.

Where art thou?

Where art thou hidden, only one of mine,
 And my desire abiding?
 Come, shew thyself and haste lo come away
 Into my place of hiding.

While yet I may be freed, come thou, redeem me,
 Over my fate be queen;
 Give back one day of youth which has been stolen
 And slay whilst my spring is green.

Thy lips may quench my flame, between thy breasts
 I shall usher out my day,
 As birds of vineyards, in the evening, pass
 Mid flowers of spice away.

Thy name is trembling on my lips, and still
 I know not who thou art;
 As a glow of fire at night time by my couch
 Thou burnest in my heart.

I wept the sleepless night; my body yearned
 For memory of thee —
 This was a shaft of cloud-kissed light to shine
 On the day's long drudgery.

In the purest of my prayers, most crystal thoughts
 In hardest trial and plea,
 My soul has asked for nought but thy revealment,
 For nought but thee, but thee. . . .

הכניסיני תחת כנפך

O come and take thou me
Beneath thy wing, safe sheltered from all cares.
Thy breast the refuge of my head shall be,
The hiding place of my rejected prayers.

In twilight's hour of ruth,
Bend down and hear the secret of my pain:
They say that somewhere in the world is youth —
Then where is mine? for I have sought in vain.

Hear yet again, I pray,
Consumed is my soul with inward fire;
And somewhere in the world is love, they say —
What is this love, to which all hearts aspire?

The stars my gaze deceived.
I had a dream, and now my dream has fled.
I come with empty hands, of all bereaved,
The last joy vanished and the last hope dead.

O come and take thou me
Beneath thy wing, safe sheltered from all cares.
Thy breast the refuge of my head shall be,
The hiding place of my rejected prayers.

Helena Frank.

מגלח-האש

The Scroll of Fire.

A legend of the Destruction of the Temple.

1.

All night the seas of flame raged and tongues of fire leapt scorching over the temple mount. From the parched heavens stars shot forth and sparks poured to the earth. Was the Lord slapping on His throne and shattering His crown to atoms? Fragments of crimson clouds, stained with blood and fire, wandered through the wastes of the night, proclaiming the wrath of the God of vengeance among the distant hills and telling of His anger in the rocky places of the desert. Had the Lord rent His purple robe and scattered its fragments to the winds? The dread of the Lord was on the distant hills and uneasy pangs stirred the ireful rocks in the desert. "The God of vengeance, Lord, the God of vengeance, hath appeared."

Lo, He is the God of vengeance, Himself in His Glory. Awful and calm, He is seated on a throne of fire in the heart of the blazing sea. His robe is of the scarlet flame and His footstool the glowing coals. The prancing, leaping flames crown Him, a cruel dance leaps flaring around. The flame devastates about His head and thirstily quaffs the everlasting stain. But He sits calm and awful, His arms across His breast, spreading the flames by His glance and heaping the fuel by a flash of His eye. Ascribe to the Lord, prancing and leaping, flame-dance and fire.

2.

When dawn broke over the mountains and the pale mists spread through the valleys the seas of flame were stilled and the tongues of fire died down from the shrine of the Lord that lay in ashes on the temple mount. The ministering angels foregathered in their sacred assemblies as was their wont to chant their morning song; they threw open the casements of the firmament and looked out towards the temple mount to see if the doors of the sanctuary had been opened and if the fumes of the incense were ascending.

And they saw and behold, the Lord God of Hosts, ancient of days, was seated in the dim morning light upon the ruins. His robe was of pillars of smoke and His footstool dust and ashes. His head was bowed between His arms and mountains of sorrow were about His head. Silent and desolate He was sitting, looking at the waste places. The wrath of the universe darkened His brow and deep silence was congealed in His eyes.

The whole temple mount was smoking yet. Heaps of ashes, mounds of cinder and smoking firebrands were massed together, and piles of smouldering embers were glowing like rubies in the twilight of the dawn. Even the fire of the lion Ariel,* which crouched continually, day and night by the altar, was quenched and was no more. A single orphaned wisp from his mane flitted trembling and aimless over a heap of charred stones in the twilight of the dawn. Then the ministering angels knew what the Lord had done; and they shook with fear, and all the stars of the morning shuddered with them. The angels hid their faces in their wings, for they were afraid to look at the grief of the Lord. On that morn their song was turned into a soft lament and a still small sigh.

* See Isaiah, XXIX.

Silently they dispersed and wept, each angel alone with his soul; and the whole world wept in stillness with them.

One soft wail, soft and deep, rose from the end of the earth and spread abroad . . . it was rent in the silence of the weeping . . . it was the heart of the world that brake, and the Lord could restrain Himself no longer. God awoke and, roaring like a lion, clapped His hands, and the Divine Presence went up from the ruins and entered into the secret places.

3.

The morning star shone in lonely sorrow above the temple mount. It looked down from the glory of the azure sky on to the ruins, and its silver beams trembled in silence.

A young angel with mournful eye and spotless wing, keeper of the pearls of hidden tears in the cup of dumb sorrow saw, from above the morning star, the wisp of fire, all that was left of Ariel, flickering, trembling and gullering among the charred stones on the temple mount. And the heart of the angel was filled with dread and he was sore troubled lest the last ember of God should become extinguished, and the holy fire be hidden from the earth, and the lamp for the people of God and for His temple perish for ever.

He flew down swiftly from above the morning star with a censer of fire in his hand, and descending to the ruins on the temple mount he hastened to the altar site, shovelled up the flame of God from the hearth, spread out his wings and flew away.

A jewel of tears dropped from the angel's eyes and fell with a steaming hiss upon the cinders. That was the only pearl which the angel drew from the cup of dumb sorrow, a tear of victory and thanksgiving for the rescue of the remnant of the fire of the Lord.

The angel sped through the thick, white clouds with the holy flame in his right hand. He pressed it firmly to his heart and touched it with his lips. The morning star leapt before him, and his heart was a spring of comfort and hope.

He brought it to a desolate island and there set it down on the crag of a precipitous rock. He lifted his mournful eyes to the heavens and his lips uttered softly: "God of mercy and salvation! Let not Thy last ember be extinguished for ever!"

The Lord perceived the heart of the angel with spotless wings and He kept the flame alive. He commanded the morning star, and said: "Care, My daughter, for My ember that it be not distinguished for like the apple of Mine eye must it be to thee. Stand by and see what shall be wrought through it."

And the morning star stayed in the heavens above the little flame, and gazed at it with unspoken love and tender delight. It guarded it on the wild desert island, visiting it in the morning with fresh risen light and stretching a beam of kindness and comfort towards it.

The young angel with mournful eyes flew up to his abode to renew his guard over the hidden tears in the cup of dumb sorrow. But his eyes were sunken and more mournful than before, and on his heart and his lips was the scar of fire, a burn which would never be healed; for the holy fire had touched them and for that there is no salve.

4.

All that time the enemy were carrying away in ships two hundred young men and two hundred maidens from the captives of Jerusalem. They were all noble and of noble birth, the fair youth of the hills of Judah. The dew of youth still rested on their locks, and the light of the heavens of Zion poured from their eyes.

It was not enough for the foe that he had ravished them and desecrated the song of their springtime for ever; he must crush their spirit altogether and meet out to them a lingering death through famine and thirst. He stripped them naked and set them down on a desolate island, the young men alone on one side of it and the maidens alone on the other; thus he left them.

The enemy designed that they should be divided in order that the burden of their misfortune be doubled. They should wander alone over the desolate island, and the one band should never find the other until their spirit was dry, their heart broken and the light of their eyes extinguished. Then, when but a step separated them and their hands were stretched forth to greet each other, they should fall to the ground and die a convulsive death on the iron earth beneath brazen skies, without comfort and without hope.

They wandered for three days on the desolate island and found neither food nor water. Sorrowful and silent they wandered; no word was spoken. Their eyes were fixed on the burning sand and their head was bent under the flaming heat of the sun. The crags of the rocks smote them with slaves of fire, and the scorpions of the cliffs mocked at their disaster.

God had cursed the island of old so that it was barren and parched; it bred only stones and scorpions. There was no stalk of grass, no spot of shade, no breath of life — only the stillness of the scorching heat and parching flame. Their eyes grew weary at its monotony, and their heart fainted within them and their spirit melted away. Even the echo of their steps was stilled, and wherever their shadow fell it was burnt up.

So the well-spring of life them was dried up and silent, and their spirit receded into a dark corner. Desire ceased,

strength was no more, the eye closed of itself; they knew not that they were wandering.

But when all life had ceased and all sound was dumb there floated suddenly out of the silence a measured step, like the echo of steady footsteps or the beating of a calm and restful heart. No one knew whence it came or whose step it was, for they heard it in their heart, it issued from their own midst. They knew that a man of mystery walked to and fro among them and their heart was in his. They were drawn after the footstep of this mysterious man and their eyes became closed as before. Their soul followed his and haunted his step. Sometimes one of them would have the strength to open his eyes a little and then among his companions he discerned two mysterious youths, alike in stature and in strength, both of them a head taller than any of the youths and with large eyes opened wide. One of them was a slim bright-eyed youth; he was gazing heavenward as if seeking there his star of life. The other was a man, with angry brow, gazing toward the earth, as if he sought what his soul had lost. The young man could not determine which of the two was the man of mystery whose step directed them, was it the slim and bright-eyed youth, or was it the man with angry brow?

5.

On the third night, an azure night of stars, the young men came to a great river, black as pitch, and shouting "Water water" they rushed to the river and drank; then they threw themselves down on the river bank to rest.

Two of the youths cried suddenly, "A mallow, a mallow", and they all rushed to the mallow and devoured it; then they returned to throw themselves down on the river bank.

They did not know that they had drunk from the river of Perdition and that their food was a plant of Satan; save one of them, the slim and bright-eyed youth; he had not drunk from the river or eaten of the mallow. He leant by the cliff and cast his eyes up to the azure of heaven. He hearkened to the song of his spirit and his gaze pierced the depth of the night. Suddenly the man with angry brow arose and, approaching the company of the young men, he said. "Brethren, have ye forgotten the song of Hate and Shame?" The young men were silent and answered not, for they were ashamed to confess that they had never known that song. However, one lad with golden locks plucked up courage to tell an untruth and said deceitfully. "Doth the lion forget his roaring or..." A flaming arrow from the eye of the man of mystery slew the lie while it was yet on the lips of the youth. The man of mystery frowned and said: "The lion became a dog of the wilderness." The lad blushed and hung his head while his fingers played round a stone. The night concealed him so that no man saw him in his shame.

The man of mystery sat by the river bank and his flaming eyes sank in the black depths and were lost therein. The young men held their peace; their mind was distressed, for the fear of God had fallen upon them and their heart beat with covert dread. Their ears were attuned to the silence, as the thirsty man in the wilderness attunes his ear to the dumb rock, trusting to hear the murmur of a sealed fountain in the heart of the stone.

Very soon the murmur of a quiet song and the strain of a still, small voice rose from beside the man of mystery. The man was singing to himself, alone, and his voice was soft, soft . . . dark, hidden and restful; the song came from the essence of the night and froze all hearts with its peace and coolness. One could not tell whether it issued slowly as a

black adder from a dark cavern in the mind of the man of mystery and was drawn to the waters, or whether the man of mystery drew it up out of the depths of the river, so that it was drawn into his soul.

The depths of Perdition are lulled, they are deep, they are
And they riddle the riddle of Death; Iblack,
There sinks like a plummet of stone in their midst the cry
Of the world on the rack.
And where is Salvation? A whoring to heavens
To their God she has gone;
She decks her with tabrets and dances on peaks of the rocks
In the face of the Stars.

The young men sat and listened in silence. Their gaze was fixed on the river. Dread whispers came to them from the depths of Perdition and flickering stars of gold troubled them from the blackness of the abyss.

The shamefaced youth picked up a pebble and threw it into the water. The bosom of the river was disturbed and roughened, its surface was turbid, the golden stars were drawn out like little snakes of fire in curves, trembling and shimmering in haste hither and thither. The heart of every youth was moved, and they were seized with dread, but none knew wherefore. A black fire lit up in the eyes of the wonder man. It was the flame of Satan, and his voice changed of a sudden; it became loud, terrifying and wrathful.

Draw from the depths of Perdition a song of defeat,
Black as the brands of your heart,
Bear it to nations broadcast with the anger of God,
Its embers pour out on their head.
And over their hayfields sow wide a consuming perdition,
Each man sow four cubits around.

When your shadow slirs over a lily in gardens of theirs
It shall blacken and die,
When your gaze lights on statues of marble all sculpted with
The shall break as a sherd; lark.
Take with you laughter, e'en laughed as bitter as
Therewith to kill. . . wormwood,

The bright-eyed youth who had been standing alone all this while by the cliff, seeking his star on high, now approached the young men, coming up behind them, his eyes still raised to the heavens, and he asked with pity:

"Brethren do you know the song of Comfort and the End?" The young men did not hear his question; they did not move their eyes or turn from the river, for the song of the other man of mystery had absorbed the soul of every one of them. They sat by the river, still speechless, like black tombstones over their own graves.

Only the shamefaced youth with golden locks who sat and played silently with the pebbles, hastened to reply again. He plucked up courage and answered deceitfully: "Doth the gazelle among the rocks forget her desire or..." The lad could not finish his lie; he had not the heart, for the two clear eyes rested on him. He put his little finger between his lips into the rosebeds of his cheeks; he looked like an innocent child caught at mischief. The bright-eyed youth smiled too, a smile of forgiveness, but he was sore troubled at heart; he went and stood in his old place with his eyes turned to the stars as before.

The song of the other man of mystery by the river side grew louder and more tempestuous till it became a roar. All the youths were caught up in the clamour of its waves, and they too cried out like lions' whelps. As they shouted so waves of hate, stronger than death, surged up in their heart.

They flowed over them, intoxicated them, marred their faces and kindled a black light in their eyes... The dark river tossed hither and thither with the whole mass of its waters from bank to bank, as a child restless in its cot. As it tossed, so the snakes of fire formed of the golden stars reflected in its depths increased and abounded.

This is the Hymn of anger, conceived on that fateful
lof nights
By fires in their rage,
From the glory of sacred and priceless bodies slain foully
land blood
Of youth and of age.

At this moment the golden-haired lad sprang to his feet, his hand pointing to the top of the cliff that hung over the opposite bank of the river, and cried out loudly: "Look, look!" The young men raised their eyes and their heart sank within them. From the summits of the mountains, from above the sides of the cliff and beyond there tripped a band as of fair angels. It was a straight, white file of tender maidens gracefully descending. In one line they came, in even step, their hands spread forth to the skies touching the rays of the moon, and their eyes fixed as in a trance... Garlands of thorns were about their heads and sufferings as of the Messiah were ingrained on their faces. An eternal faith slept beneath their lids and a gentle smile played on their lips.

They young men watched them, afraid and breathless, for they saw the maidens advancing and approaching with closed eyes to the edge of the cliff that overhung the river like a darkening wall; it appeared that in an instant a mere step would separate them from the depth that yawned below...

They rushed forward waving their hands and called out to them, but the maidens seemed neither to hear nor see but continued to walk in line with light, even step and closed eyes. It was the last step . . . A long thread of eyes were suddenly opened, shone an instant like stars and wept, then flew like a band of white storks to the dark waters . . .

The young men started with a shout of terror and plunged into the water; their locks bristled as a lion's mane and their hands cleft the bosom of the deep. They hastened, diving, gliding and leaping towards the cliff. Their heads entered the heavy shadow of the cliff . . . they were about mid-stream . . . the river surged and foamed in a torrent. A great dark breaker, rising like a dread mountain out of the heart of the deep, threw the daring youths backward. But they struggled on and topped its crest. The breaker was still and motionless; it stood on a great mound of water with a thought of violence lurking in its midst. The young men plunged and climbed on and through, on and up, and they came to the crest . . . The cry of the maidens rose from beyond the breaker — suddenly the mountain was cleft revealing the valley of the shadow of death — and the young men slid into the descent of the open depth and there, in the nethermost places of Sheol, their heads struck against the heads of the maidens who floated towards them . . .

A profound silence, a rest welcome to Perdition lay suddenly on the river. The valley was sealed over the bold youths. On the expanse of dark waters there floated what appeared to be a dark and heavy mass which floated silently after the bodies as they were swept away. Was it a black ship or was it a coffin for the dead?

The tender bright-eyed youth, who alone was left of the young men near the cliff, threw himself on the ground and burying his face in his hands wept and wept and wept.

When the youth rose from the ground he cast his eye heavenward, as was his wont, and beheld a maiden standing on the heights of the cliff opposite him. She was pure and graceful as an angel of humility, her flesh was pure and her eyes shone, gazing straight before her; and above her head beamed the morning star.

The heart of the youth beat faster, and for the first time in his life he dropped his eyes abashed to the ground. His gaze fell on the river and rested on the image of the maiden reflected there with the morning star.

It was the first time the youth had looked that night into the depth of Perdition.

Suddenly the youth sank down on his knees again before the image in the waters. His eyes were wrapped in the depths with pangs of love and his lips muttered, distraught with yearning.

"My sister, art thou my sister?"

The youth was silent; he could speak no more for his heart throbbed and his soul was lost in his soul? . . .

After a moment he bestirred himself and opened his eyes. They were dreaming, and a soul mortally wounded by love, and flowing with blood beat round in their recesses. The lad closed his eyes, grieved and full of anguish, and with a mysterious sigh drawn from a secret and hidden sorrow, as a spring concealed by the sward sighs towards eventide, there welled up to his lips this prayer:

"Art thou my only one, lamp of my life and angel of my heart, from my birth to this very day? Art thou she, now revealed to me from the pinnacles of the rocks, on this isle of wilderness, beneath the wings and star of the morning? My soul has ever cried for thee from the valleys of my life with a thousand voices, and along ten thousand hidden, crooked

ways it has fled from thee to thee. . . In the dawn of my childhood I beheld thy beauty and coveted thy hidden light in secret, by night and in the morning. Among the hills of Samaria, beneath the vines in the vineyards my mother bore me, the garlands of palms and vines were my coil and the song of birds my lullaby. Tall, waving cornfields of sacred produce blessed my childhood and forests of green avenues and the foliage of pines told me their secrets. I loved the God of the hills and valleys, and I feared the God of the heavens. Towards the morning when the first shepherd's horn sounded from the hilltop over a silent world, and a sweet, sacred fear wrapped me about, I would steal out alone from the booth where I slept and ascend the green hillside. My feet were dipped in dew of the morning and I gazed towards the azure skies and saw thy glory in the morning star and thy presence in the lustre of its humble light. Thou didst give me a sign of secret love from on high and made my heart tremble at the quiver of thy lids. I came to love the heavens too and their fulness for thy sake. . . ."

"Afterwards I became a lonely orphan. . . . My father died in war, and the curse of God was on his bones; and my mother profaned her heart for handfuls of barley in a foreign land. I was left all alone: by day I wandered desolate among the mountains, and at night I clung to a rock. Foxes paced round me in the darkness and the raven terrified me with its hoarse cries. I was tender and alone and musing; I had nothing but a soul trembling like a bird, and eyes that looked and wondered. Thou didst appear to me then, white and mournful from the dark mists of night, coming early in the morning to my stony pillow, to the hillside where I lodged. At dawn thou didst awaken me from the hilltops and tended me lovingly with the ray of salvation; thine eye of gold rested on me with a mother's care. . . . Thou didst teach me the

sorrow of secrets, the pangs of silence and the chastenings of love. . . And I would look for thee early at daybreak from the little hill, and at night as a weaned child for its mother, so would I watch and long for thee. . . . One day an old man from Judaea who was wandering on the mountains found me at dawn. He wore a cloak, his hair was long, he walked in mourning mood and wrath; he was a Nazirite, a holy man of God, awe-inspiring and majestic; his appearance was like a cloud of glory and the hoarfrost towards morning. The old man took pity on me, set me down within his tent and covered me with the shadow of his long, white beard. He taught me his ways and made me worship his gods; he removed my soul from all delight and trained me to gaze at the heavens. All the buds of my youth he cut off one by one and offered them to his gods, and he devoted my chief desires to the heavens, and my days like his were for fasting, and my nights, like his, for prayer. I feared the old man as a flower dreads the autumn. My face grew wan, my brow paled from day to day — but my hair grew into locks and in my heart a whole forest of dreams sprang up. I was lost in the thick darkness of that forest; I was like a young hind trapped among the cedars of Lebanon. . . . But the forest in my heart was transformed to a garden, flowering with sweet blooms and bathed in the sunlight. Thou wast like a daughter of God, woven of light and brilliance, roaming among its beds of spices, with the smile by which thou bestowest life on thy lips; and I was a fond trembling dove perched on thy white shoulder. . . . In those days I was still pure, modest and shy; my soul was spotless as a dewdrop on the petals of a rose, and my heart was clear as a pearl of the waters of Siloam on the edge of a crystal goblet.

“Albeit a thousand springs of life surged through my heart and my soul begged for abundant love. Then thy image

opened as a flower before me in the midst of all my thoughts, and suddenly there rose in my mind the likeness of a woman and a daughter of God; but I knew not how or when that likeness was woven in my mind. . . . Then it seemed to me that God had set thee in my heart of old, and that in days long since I had passed thee by upon one of the stars or in an early dream, and thou hadst called me by name. The image of thee was graven in white fire before my sight, and I recalled thy sweet scent from the memories of my distant youth, and in its speechless dreams I heard the echo of thy voice. When I walked by day, with my eyes cast heavenwards, I felt for thy shadows about me like a blind man, and in the restless night I sought thee on my couch. . . . The old man would rise in the night to awaken the dawn, and stand by his open casement facing the east, his eyes uplifted and his lips in unison with the stars of the morning, chanting his sacred prayer to the God of his life. I still lay on my couch in the dark, burning with a fire of love, overwhelmed by the pain of my secret desires; my soul trembled and struggled like a suckling lamb between the teeth of a hungry lion; I wept, I gnashed my teeth, and in my turmoil of lust I uttered a sinful prayer to the God of my life. . . . The chant of the old man came to me as a pure spring flows into a seething ocean. . . . I despised myself and was sore troubled; I muttered vows in the darkness of my soul. . . . I was afraid of the old man, lest he should find my defiled spirit and burn it with the embers of his eyes. . . . I dared not raise my eyes to heaven again, but cast them into the gloomy depths of my soul, I burrowed like a worm on a rainy day. . . . But thou, pure, comely and kind, thou didst pity me and not despise my affliction. . . . From on high through the casement thou didst peep at me in my bed and shone on me. . . . Thou didst cast thy beam as in days gone by and didst purify me; the light from the hyssop

of thy rays touched my heart . . . and it became whiter than snow. . . Then I went out to the waters of the brook to cleanse me early for the sanctity of heaven and to give my soul wholly to the Lord. The morning breezes wafted over me from all the heights fresh bounty of holiness; I felt that I was going to a great council of saints. I was full of the might of God; my heart was new, my spirit girt, my soul exulting, I did not know myself. I scanned the heavens with uplifted head as I went down to the brook. Suddenly the splashing of waters — a stream of crystals struck my ear as the sigh of harps. I looked up and was struck dumb in astonishment. There in the brook before me I saw a girl bathing, and her fair skin shone at me out of the seeming darkness and maddened me. . . I had almost sprung on her as a leopard — but the image of the saintly old man rose before me — and I strangled my desire with a cry. I hid myself in a cleft of the rock and spied out from there on her fair body. I consumed her white flesh with my eyes, and my soul fondled with tremulous rapture her virgin breasts. I ground my teeth, I clenched my fist — I know not against whom, whether against the heavens for tempting me, or against Satan for provoking me. I brought my fist down in anger like a hammer on the rock, and shattered it; my feet ground the pebbles under them. When my madness had left me dark thoughts of terror seized me, and I was in great dread of myself. I was afraid of Purgatory and the Void, for I saw my soul both black and white, a mixture of light and darkness; and I saw my heart to be an adder's den, an eagle's nest. Is that why my soul has ever thirsted for the dawn, and my heart yearned for the gloaming? . . . I sat there on the bank, desolate, my eyes on the water and my head bowed beneath the weight of its dark brooding. It was if I sat at the crossroads of curse and benediction. I caught sight of my

hair in the water; it had grown long and thick, and hung darkly about me like a curtain of black serpents. It was plotting against my soul there, on the bed of the stream — so I sprang up and consecrated my locks too to Heaven. The spell was broken. . . . With a trembling heart I told my secret to the old man, and he blessed me with his look, and at sunrise sent me to Jerusalem. I entered through the gateway of God, with sacrifice and meat offering in my hand. I saw the holy temple, the youths and priests in their glory and the busle of its courts — and my heart sank within me. I cut the hair of my head over the blood of my sacrifice and cast my locks on the altar fire; in a moment they had ascended in the flame of the sacrifice to heaven, the glory of my youth was turned to ashes, a sweet savour to the Lord. . . . A wave black as the altar of smoke and the hate of death leapt suddenly from my scorched soul and darkened my sight; I would have cried out like a lion but at that instant a swell of praise from the Levites swept over me and the blast of trumpets and the sound of psalteries drowned my cry; my heart throbbed and was lost in the tumult of tabrets and cymbals. I fell powerless before the venerable priest clothed in white linen, buried my head in the folds of his robe, among the bells and the pomegranates, and wept and confessed, and wept again. . . .

“As I made my way out of the court of the sanctuary, I beheld a small lock of my hair, saved from the fire and cast at the side of the Altar, near the ashes. I stole my lock, the sign of my vow, from the table of God, I hid it in my bosom and fled away with it. I wore it as a seat over my heart for many days and hung it as a talisman about my neck. When my hair began to grow again I took it out and, kissing it, threw it to the winds; so I returned what I had stolen to the heavens.

“Now, see how the heavens have betrayed me and deceived

me cruelly on every side. My youth, my all have they taken from me, and given me nought in return. Like a humbled slave I have lifted my eyes towards them day by day, I have begged mutely for my portion like a dog, and without a murmur I have borne my lot. But they have held their silence in pride and consumed my youth with deceitful justice. Now I am left once more, alone in a desert land. My spring is marred, wrathful and angry it turns to leave me, without a kiss or farewell bidding, whilst I still follow and cling to it like a child, embracing and kissing its feet, holding the hem of its cloak and crying in agitation: "Do not leave me!" — Then thou didst suddenly appear to me, my stay, queen of my soul, thou standest now before me in the plenitude of thy beauty on the earth. The sceptre of happiness is in thy hand and the diadem of salvation on thy brow. No sooner had I seen thee than all my imprisoned desires emerged like adders from their burrows and glided tremulous, parched and famished towards thee, thee only, and a strange rebellious fire shone in their eyes. . . . See — my heavens filled with stars of gold and silver I shall give thee for one handful of love, one touch of thy sceptre. What care I for the heavens now that thou hast left them for my sake, now that thy grace is departed from them? The columns of the sky are overthrown the temple of the Lord is in ruins, His throne is shattered, the gateway of God has become the gate to the dunghills. But I have grown strong and comely, my pride is unbroken, my strength is a lion's and thou art with me; now command me and I will scatter my locks, and break up like stubble the heavens quaking above me. Speak — and I will plunge my life into this sink of Perdition, and as I did cast my eyes towards thy image therein, even so I will never raise them to the heavens again. . . . Take me, pity me, bear me up, my sisler, — lo, I am in thy hand. Put me as a seal upon thy

heart or a stool for thy feet. . . I shall crouch as a dog by the skirts of thy robe and watch thy lids move or thy finger beckon. Or I shall spring on thee like a young lion and carry thee away to the jungle. . . ."

The youth stopped suddenly, then softly added:

"Or I shall create thee a new heaven, and surround thee with new azure and lustre. I shall set thee as a sun in the wheel of my life and weave the memory of thee into the song of my soul. I shall fashion thee garlands for my prayers and pave thy steps with lily white flowers. I shall hover about thy throne like a fiery eagle, and waft a flame on thee with my pinion. I shall fly at thy word to unimagined heights and my happy cry will reach the distant suns. . . ."

The eyes of the youth opened — the struggle was reflected in them. . . . He gazed lovingly to where the girl was standing; he was in a fever of terror. But when he looked he was turned to stone. The girl could be seen no more on the top of the cliff, but her image was still reflected in the river as the imprint of a seal, and it gazed up at him together with the morning star from the black depths. . . . A great fire burned in the heart of the youth and scorched him. He shook his fist, and cried out in his lornment and vexation, "Fire, Fire, Fire!" From the top of the cliff on the opposite bank of the river the echo came, "Fire, Fire"; the river of Perdition swirled into a raging fire, and the whole isle became a roaring mass of flame. . . . After the tumult came a great silence, the silence of dawn. . . . The head of the youth drooped weakly on to his breast and his eyes were yoked to the depths of the river. He wondered in silence at the secret of Perdition and tried to probe its depths with his eyes. All was still in the darkness around him; all was still in the darkness of his heart. A black wing of mourning was spread over his head and the sorrow of his thoughts — valleys of the deep.

In the bosom of the heavens, above the head of the youth, one eye was still glancing down at him kindly, a great golden eye, shining and watching. . . . It was the eye of the morning star. There the morning star, hung on high, uttered God's blessing over the youth; it leant towards him and beckoned — but he knew it not. . . . Suddenly the youth awoke and drawing his eyes from the depths of Perdition he cast them up to the expanse of heavens. He was weighing them in the balance of his eyes, as if to say, "The heavens or Perdition?"

The bath of azure cleansed his eyes, their light returned to them, and they became bright and full of grace again; but he did not know that the flame had seared them. . . .

The peace of the morning entered the heart of the youth; it was a soothing balsam to his scarred soul, and his heart was at rest and subdued. When he looked again towards the top of the cliff he beheld in the skies far above, a small lonely cloud, hovering aloft. The cloud was silvery and winged, and beneath the wing a hand was seen, stretched towards the morning star. Was it the image of an angel, or the image of the maiden? . . .

His gaze was fixed on the morning star and his soul was caught in its rays. It was the queen of light, and the purity of its lustre shone bright and clear as of old; its lamp was not dim nor its flame low. At dawn, when mysterious men, the great hermits and orphans of the world, go forth to wander alone among the clouds of the sky and to tread the first paths of the mountain tops — the morning star goes forth too, alone and mysterious like them, salutes them with its graceful light, and its constant blessing and token is "Be pure, be pure, be pure!" It gathers all their souls, wheresoever they be, into one point of light — the acme of dawn. . . .

An unbearable longing seized the youth, and the love of

God stronger than death flowed over his heart with its seas of delight. He quaffed the azure of the heavens to excess. . . Then the lad rose erect, and raising his hand cried:

"O God! Even the fire in my heart I consecrate to the heavens! A great light shone in his eyes after he had made his sacred oath, for he saw the morning star smiling on him and its light rejoicing; it was inspired with a new blessing of God. He believed in his star and trusted it; he knew that God had called him and answered him by the fire in his heart; that He had set him a task on that island — but he knew not what it was. He bestirred himself and started walking straight along by the river bank to meet what was prepared for him with a confident heart. The sound of the fire beat in his ears and the streaks of dawn shone before him.

The image of the girl was in the water and the silvery cloud was in the sky — they too moved, and went before him.

The youth did not marvel at this mystery, for a greater mystery than this had entered his heart as he went forward in silence toward the morning star.

7.

When the youth had gone some distance he found the river bank along which he was walking become higher and higher till it was on a level with the cliff opposite it. The two cliffs then drew closer, gradually throwing the stream that coursed between them into the shade. They appeared like two conspirators in league against Perdition, and plotting to trap it between their precipitous sides and strangle it there in the darkness. . .

The youth looked down calmly into the chasm and wondered whether a man who descended into that valley of the shadow of death could come forth alive.

The youth did not pause on his way, for he was in haste

to ascend. . . . He plodded on, up along the cliff, the cloud in the skies and the reflection in the water advancing before him.

All at once the silvery cloud stopped over a crag of rock. The youth peered into the distance and then beheld as it were a great, black peak rising from the clouds of dawn. The peak towered high and rested on the sides of the cliffs. The river of Perdition flowed under it and from its summit a small light threw its beams. . .

The youth scented the fire of the sanctuary from afar and his spirit was moved. . . This was the hidden lamp of God that scintillated among the clouds of the wilderness and twinkled from the pinnacles of the rocks. The light sparkled and quivered, and seemed to whisper of help. . . Who had kindled that light on the peak, and who was guiltless and pure enough to be worthy of it? Was that indeed the thing which God had set for him on this island?

Great and boundless joy of God flowed tumultuously to his soul; his heart beat with anxiety and he rejoiced in tremulous hope and faith. His steps were light as he tripped on towards the lamp of God. The noise of the fire was in his ears, and in his heart the blessing of dawn pulsated. The shining light seemed to grow bigger. It was like a small tongue of fire that danced lovingly before its sister, the dawn. It was like a flame, and it burnt like the fire of Ariel, which he had seen on the Altar. . . The youth recognised the sacred fire, the eagle in his heart awoke and flew up with a shout to rend the skies, "The fire of the Lord, the fire of the Lord!" — The youth forgot Sheol beneath and springing to the pinnacle of the rock he rushed to the sacred flame and waved it towards the heavens. There he stood aloft, majestic in the flower of his youth and beauty. He raised his crown of locks on high, and the torch of salvation burnt in his hand. The

silvery cloud covered his head and the morning star blessed his power. A mighty shout of joy was on the lips of the youth when there appeared to him again the image of the maiden from the depth of Perdition. . . Lo! it was she in all her delight and glory, her light shining on her brow. She gazed towards him and threw her fire deep into his soul. Silently she was drawn upwards towards him, and silently she drew him down to her, to Sheol. Her hands were stretched towards him, spread to give and to receive. She looked with a love, mightily as death, and moments to her were as eternally.

The youth clasped the holy torch to his heart and closing his eyes tight in dread, cried out, "Heavens — Perdition — thou art..." and he dropped from the peak into the arms spread out in the depths of Perdition. . .

The lamps of God went out in the heavens, the skies grew dim; they looked sad and bare, like the fields of God when the harvest is done. In a corner of the field, like a useless vessel, there lay the sickle moon. . .

The silvery cloud quivered and melted away; the morning star shook — and was no more. . . For the lioness of the morning had awoken in her den and trod with royal might on the rim of the firmament. Crowned with her golden mane she stirred forth, and scattered her light to the ends of the hills. . .

8.

The waters washed up the youth on a distant shore, in a foreign land, the land of exile.

He roamed through all its provinces and came among the exiles. He passed among them like an olden legend or a vision of days to come; he was an enigma and a mystery to all.

He looked up at the heavens — they were strange to him, he gazed at the earth — it too seemed unknown. He trained

himself to gaze before him to bounds of the universe, even as the image of the maiden had gazed at him on that morning.

When had he beheld that morning?

The youth wandered through the earth as a lone star over the waste places of the universe. He went naked and barefoot with head erect; he had nothing but the great fire in the valleys of his heart and the twilight of dawn in the depths of his eyes.

When had the fire descended into his heart?

For the heart of the youth had been refined in a threefold furnace and a great threefold flaming fire burnt in it — the fire of God, the fire of Satan, and stronger than both, the fire of love.

He bore that fire to the four corners of the earth, to set hearts alight with the breath of his lips, and he kindled the lamps in waning eyes.

He went among his brother exiles and saw them in their affliction and low estate. He shared their sorrow and joined in their cry. And in the cry were heard the call of Heaven and Sheol, the zeal of God and the tempest of his anger, the sigh of a soul dying in the pangs of unrequited love, and the groan of the world on the night of the Destruction.

The youth was silent in his vexation, his cry was stilled; but there was no sorrow so great as his, though speechless, no trouble like his, though dumb.

No man could face his steadfast gaze. Some would turn their eyes away towards the heavens, others would droop them to the ground. The youth would look silently at such people till they had passed away, pitying them much. . .

The youth also met men of anger full of hatred. They too trembled beneath his gaze and made away in haste with lowering forehead and darkened brows. They fixed their eyes on the ground and put their hands over their hearts, as if to

hide some stolen treasure from the sight of the mysterious youth.

But the man of mystery probed their heart; he entered their soul as it were a fallen city. There he found all their hidden plagues, and shared in their struggles and suffered their torments sevenfold.

If he found a quiet and trustful heart he would pierce it so that it would sicken to death, its rest would depart from it for ever, and that placid man would sleep no more by night.

Many came and silently bowed their heads beneath his blessing and his curse. They sought rebuke and prayer at his lips and from his eyes — mercy and hope.... A sea of compassion flowed in the heart of the youth, and its comforts dropped as morning dew on stricken hearts; he gazed towards them kindly, and his eyelids were the eyelids of the dawn. The youth also bore in his heart the mighty brilliance of the sun and the shades of night with their secrets — but he longed only for the dawn. The glow of daybreak became the seal upon his soul and the twilight of dawn his song of life.

At times he was sore troubled by painful dreams which haunted him. At dawn he would go out of the city and recline beneath a tamarisk on the bank of a slumbering river. He would cast his eyes up to the morning star and seek its reflection in the waters. He would close his eyes tight and look into the depths of his soul for long. He would be silent, like the universe, with his great sorrow, for himself alone.

The young and bright-eyed angel with spotless wings who was above the morning star would softly lift the cup of dumb sorrow, and pour from it tear after tear in the stillness of dawn. . .

1905

בית-עולם

The Cemetery.

The oak-trees whisper softly, and softly to me they say:

“Come, hide beneath our shadow, O Mortal, there decay!

This tomb, this heap of dust to thy pain and livelong grief —

Faithful to thee for ever — they will bring relief.

Die not so oft, for life with a thousand deaths is filled,

Die once, expire for ever, — rest peaceful and be stilled!

We'll dig thee softly over, smooth out the silent grave;

Thy half shall worms consume, but a half for sap we crave,

For by aid of all we thrive. Life endless shall be thine,

To blossom forth a flower, or be woven in a vine.

To live in all that liveth wherever thou wilt be,

So come beneath us, come, the flesh and blood of thee!”

Softly the oak-trees whispered, and thus they made their plea,

While the tombs stood dumb around and silently pitied me

אחרי מותי

When I am Dead.

When I am dead, mourn thus for me and say:

There lived a man, and see, he is no more;

Timeless to death he went,

And in the middle day

His song of life was rent;

Ah! pity, for he had yet one song more,

And now that song is lost, and lost for aye.

Ah! pity, for he had a harp — a soul

To live and speak; and as the singer spanned

The secrets of his heart therewith, the strings

Spoke 'neath his hand.

But of his secrets one was hid in heart,

His fingers skimmed about it and around,

One string was left for dumb, and till this day

It gives no sound.

It is great pity, all her days this string,

Panting in silence, trembles for her song;

And for her love to rescue she may yearn,

Desire and long,

As the heart throbs for the invited guest,

And if he tarry she waits endless days,

To weep with hidden sighs that he comes not,

But still delays.

Now is there vexation to dismay,

There lived a man, and see, he is no more,

For in the middle day

His song of life was rent,

Yet he had one song, one ballad more,

And now that song is lost, and lost for aye.

1904

וריתי לרוח אנחתי

I sowed my sighs upon the wind,
My tears bedewed the sand
If thou find my friend, O wind, tell him
I am a smoking brand.

That a spring of light welled up in me
And drop by drop it dried,
But in my heart a flame of fire
Burns feverish and wide.

And now my spring is like a wound
That throbs, then burns and glows,
But rolled in dust and blood my heart .
Still smoulders in their throes.

לא זכיתי באור מן ההפקר

My Spark.

I have not won the light from freedom's courses,
Nor from my father's part
Came it to me; 'tis hewn from crags of mine,
I carved it from my heart.

One spark is hid in the forlress of my heart,
So small, but mine alone;
I asked it of no man, I stole it not,
'Tis in me, and my own.

And when my heart is broken 'neath the hammer
Of torments and their curse,
This spark wings out, flies up into my eyes,
And thence into my verse.

And from these lines 'twill fly up to your heart,
In the brightness of your fire
That I have kindled it will hide, and I
With my blood shall feed the pyre.

1902

ואם ישאל המלאך

And if the Angel Ask

My son, where is thy soul?
"Wander on earth to seek it, angel of mine!
For there is a leafy village, walled by the woods,
With boundless azure firmament above,
And in the blue there rests its daughter fair —
A small white cloud and lone.
A child plays there alone on a summer morn,
Left to himself, a tender dreaming mite;
Angel, that child am I.

The world had wrapped itself away, so still,
And heavenwards the child's two eyes were drawn,
Forth went his soul, as a dove flies from its cote
To the sweet cloud in the sky."

And did it melt away?
"There is a sun in the world, angel of mine,
Its kindly golden rays have saved my soul
Which danced for man a day on wings of light
As a white butterfly.
One morn it rode astride a golden ray,
To seek a gem of dew among the grass;
But a clear, unsullied tear upon my cheek
Trembled, the sunray shook, down fell my soul
And sank within the tear."

Dried it to nothing? — "Nay;
It lighted on a holy Talmud page,
My grandad's vellum Talmud, fingered much,
And in its womb — two hairs of his white, beard,
With threads of Tsitsith torn from Arba Kanfoth,
And many a trace of candle grease and wax;
Within this Talmud and its letters dead
My soul beat round alone."

And was it strangled? — "Nay;
For it beat round and sang, angel of mine!
My songs poured forth to life in those dead letters
All kinds of songs — About a small bright cloud;
Of Tsitsith torn, about the drops of wax;
But one song was unknown — of youth and love.
It strove to leave, it sighed, no comfort found,
And listless, pined away in woe to death.
One day I visited my musty Talmud.
My soul had flown from there!

Lo! It roams and wanders o'er the world,
Wanders, straying, with no comfort found;
On bashful nights, when the new month is born,
And all pray that the moon fill up her round,
It beats its wings against the gate of Love,
Beating, knocking, weeping — ah, so soft,
And all for love its prayer. . ."

1905

נטף נטפה הדמעה

The Exile's Tear.

The tear flowed down — there fell a ray of light
And smote thereon. . .
Cold struck my heart, in yet a little while
My tear was gone. . .

In lack of all I go, ah woe is me!
The tear I weep
Can pierce no gentile heart, or steal from him
A mile of sleep. . .

Where shall I bear my torture, whither go?
Upon my bed
Another tear — one half for you and half
For my heart — I shed.

The light is tardy coming, to give me life
It is too small;
There is one sun on high, one song for the heart —
And that is all.

לבדי

Alone.

The wind has borne them away, the light has drawn them,
New songs have gladdened their life in its dayspring
And I am left, a lender dove forgotten,
Beneath the Shechinah* wing.

Alone, alone I am left. The Shechinah too
Her broken wing holds trembling o'er my head.
My heart discerns her heart; surely for me,
Her only son, is her dread.

From every corner she is driven forth,
Save one obscure and desolate recess —
The Beth Hamidrash — there in the shadows hid
I am with her in distress.

And when I yearn for the casement, toward the light,
Beneath her wing I am cramped as in a cage,
She droops her head on my shoulder, and her tears
Fall on my Talmud page.

Softly she weeps o'er me, to me doth cling,
And shades me over with her broken wing;
"The wind has borne them away; they all have flown,
And I am left alone."

It is the closing of an ancient dirge,
Thal silent weeping, like a prayer I hear
Thal supplication is and adoration;
I see thal scalding tear.

1902

* Generally given as "Divine Presence", but used in sense of
'inspiration'.

בתשובתי

On my Return.

Here again is the wizened man
With shrunk and shrivelled look,
Shade of dry stubble, wandering leaf
That strays from book to book.

Here again is the wizened housewife,
Knitting socks and fumbling,
Her mouth with oaths and curses filled,
Her lips for ever mumbling.

Our cat is there: he has not stirred
From his quarters in the house;
But by the oven dreams he makes
A lealy with a mouse.

The rows of spiders' webs are there,
As of old in darkness, spread
In the western corner, choked with flies,
Their bodies blown out — dead.

You have not changed, you're antic old,
There's nothing new I think;
Friends, let me join your club, we'll rot
Together till we sink.

על ראש הראל

On Pisgah Height.

On the peak of Almighty mountain
There stands since the youth day of time,
Remote, with his arms spread to Heaven,
A man, grey in silence, alone;
In his left hand a staff wielding power,
Whilst his right grasps the tables of stone;
And before him effulgence of glory,
For his girdle cloud hillocks sublime.

At his feet are two giants struck down,
Anakim in stature and main;
They contended against him with strength,
They attacked him in battle arrayed;
With an axe and a spear they presumed
To clamber on high and essayed
To wrest from his arms the Commandments
Engraven of stone — but in vain.

His eyes are aglow with the light
That is soft 'neath the eyelids of morn,
Looking down on the giants below
With the gaze of the righteous and meek;
The knees of the giants are sinking
Beneath them and bending, and weak.
Be still in his presence exalted!
Like to him has none ever been born.

1893

אם יש את-נפשך לדעת
If you would Know.

If you would know the spring whence strength of soul
Was drawn in evil days woeful as these
By those who gladly walked to meet their death,
Bending the neck beneath the biting steel — —
The headsman's axe — or climbing to the stake,
First to the faggots clinging there to die —
Proclaiming Unity — the martyr's death...
If you would know the well where those who, crushed
Between the straits of Chaos and the Grave,
Drew comforts of the Lord, and mighty faith
To suffer long, and iron strength to bear
Travail, with shoulder set to toil in life
Of rancour and despite, toil without end
Beneath the boundless burden. . . .
If you would see the bosom where your people
Wept heart and soul their fill of bitterness,
With groans that surged as waters flowing forth,
Groans to sound terror in the deepest Hell
And sights to pluck the devil cold with dread,
Shrieks to split rocks, but not the hardened hearts
Of foes who better Satan. . . .
If you would know the stronghold where your fathers
Salvaged their soul's desire and held the Law,
Holy above all Holies to be saved;
If you would know the hiding place that kept
Their mighty spirit and its essence pure,
That, sated with reproach and calumny,
Grey hairs sapped not the pleasantness of youth. . . .
If you would know the mother merciful,
The aged matron, loving to the last,

Who gathered of her wandering child the tears,
With great compassion tended all his hurt;
And when the outcast came again and faint,
She wiped away his tears, and 'neath her roof
Gave him wing'd shade and lulléd him to sleep....
Ah! Chastened brother, if you know not these,
Turn to the Beth Hamidrash,* antic, old,
In the long nights of winter desolate,
In summer days that scorch and flame with heat,
At noontide, dawn or in the twilight turn,
And if a miserable remnant yet
Is spared of God, perchance to-day you'll see
In the deep shadows of the wall and dark
The corner there, fast by the chimney-piece,
A few stray sheaves — ghosts of much lost,
Some shrivelled Jews with parched and wizened face,
Jews of the Exile, burdened with its yoke,
Who lose their pain in faded Talmud page,
Their misery in Midrash tales of old.
And sing their sorrows in a psalm of praise.
(Ah me! How slight and worthless all must seem
In eyes of strangers, heedless to discern.)
Then shall the heart inform you how your feel
Stand on the threshold of our House of Life,
And our Soul's treasure-house your eyes behold.
If God has spared you of the holy spirit,
Nor taken all His soothing from your heart,
And rays of hope for better days than these
At times illumine all its leagues of darkness,
Brother of distress, know this to be
A salvaged spark, small fugitive of flame,

* House of Study.

Saved by a miracle from that great fire
Your sires kept ever ardent on their altar.
Who knows but that the rivers of their tears
Have borne and brought us hither, and their prayers
Have loaned us of the Lord, and thro' their death
They bade a life be ours, life to world's end?

1898

תקון חצות *

The Midnight Service.

A rain-gushed night: the reckless wind has swept
Over the town a cloud with rain-drops deep.
And all the little hamlet sinks away
In a deep slough of sleep.

Dark entrances are silent: pelling rain
Beats down on them, and houses here and there
On shiffling bases, like to be swept away,
Loom with a blackening stare.

Is there an orphan whom men of kindly heart
Forgot to give a cloak to keep him warm?
E'en so the bending rafters, nestling close,
Creak softly in the storm.

As if they thought and conjured in their brain
Images of evil, murmurless;
Do they awaken to their very bones
And challenge all to stress?

Sleepers in darkness mouth a curse in dreams
Against the morrow and the morrow. Rest
Eternal mendicants, see this good dream —
A race with yoke oppressed.

Between the cracks the howling wind breaks through,
Making the blood to freeze. Ah mel who knows
But that the curse of a lost guiltless brother
Is wrapt there in its throes?

No more in heaven beams a single star,
No spark of light, no ray bold through the air;
Save where a lonely lattice still bears light —

1988 A Jew at his Midnight Prayer.

* A prayer of Kabbalist origin recited by certain sects of Polish Jewry.

נוכח נדח

A Lone Star.

A star forlorn has risen from thick darkness —
 Illumine, star of mine, my mourning road!
 'Tis not the strails of Sheol that torment me,
 But life that wearies me — my days a load.
 Loyal to the poor-house, at tramping an old hand,
 Schooled to the yoke, to walk in need of bread;
 My father — bitter exile, my mother — want,
 'Tis not my staff or the shameful scrip I dread!
 More cruel than these, more bitter sevenfold
 Is life without hope or brightness for the eyes;
 To sink as lead, drop deep within dark places,
 A life sans hope, but of rot that pulrefies:
 The life of a hungry dog, bound by its rope —
 How art thou cursed, thou life without a hope!
 Illumine, star, my soul that has despaired
 Through pagan worship and 'neath exile's weight,
 Throw far thy beams, illumine the thick darkness —
 I'm here to go, or I am here to wail. . . .
 Who knows how long again my night will be
 What tramp and darkness God stores up for me —
 And when I peer out from the dark I see
 Thy staff of light — turn thou and comfort me.
 To water my last flower of hope a clear
 And crystal drop I guard — It is a tear.
 Within my heart still glows an olden fire
 Let it burst into flame ere it expire.
 Ah! what is left of me throbs, with new life,
 To fall in action, and to end in strife!

אכן חציר העם

Surely the People is Grass.

Because the breath of the Lord bloweth upon it:
— surely the people is grass. — Isaiah xl. 7.

Surely the people is grass, now do they fade like a blossom;
Surely the people is slain — it is slain with a
slaughter unending.

Lol when the voice of their God thunders about them
forever,
This is a people that moves not, a people that stirs
not nor trembles;

Nor do they rise like a lion, nor like a young lion
waken,
Nor at the voice do they tremble, never a man of them
stirreth.

Nay, and the hearts of the people thrill not with
gladness together,
When from the eastward and westward, calling from
ocean to ocean,

Eager to make themselves known as the seed of the God
ever living,
Sons of their own come flocking, drawn from afar at
His summons.

Nor do they reach forth the hand, questioning all of
their welfare,
All that have called on His name, all that are blameless
and faithful.

Now in a tumult of folly, of people surrounding their
idols,
Quelled is the message of God, silenced the might of
His thunder.

Deep in the heart of the foolish, with evil and shame
and reviling,
Scorned is the word of the Lord, set as a mark for
derision.

Surely the people wither, full of their vileness and
venom,
Yea, from the foot to the head, all of it rotten
and worthless:

Seeing they raised not a man from their midst in the day
of their anguish,
One that was mighty in works, living, whose heart should
impel him;

One in whose heart should burn a spark to enkindle the
life-blood,
One from whose brow a flame should light up the path
of the people;

One who would treasure the name of his God and the name
of the nation
Far over wealth of gold, more than the falsehood of
idols.

Lifting of heart would be his, truth in its fullness and
power,
Hate of his people's portion, their life of scorning and
bondage;

Pity as great as the sea, compassion as wide as their
ruin,
Wide as his people's weakness, strong as the weight of the
burden;

These would surge in his heart, surge and rage like the
ocean,
These would burn like a fire, burn in the blood till it
kindle;

These would thunder with joy, by day and by night
unceasing:
"Rise ye and serve! and work! for the hand of our God
is with us."

Surely the people perish, they breathe but shame
and scorning.
None of their works have foundation, law is there
none in their doings.

Ages of endless wandering, exile too vast for en-
durance,
Turned all the heart of them backward; counsel has
died from the people.

Taught of the rod and the lash, can they perceive now
their anguish —
Shame and pain of the spirit — aught but the thrall of
the body?

Have they the heart to care for other than care of the
moment —
Men that are lost in the darkness, deep in the pit of
the exile?

Can they now lift up their soul to the day or be prophets
of morning,
Draw out their hope to the end, send on the word to the
future?

Never will these awake, except that the scourge awake
them;
Never will these arise, with only the ruin to rouse
them.

Dried is the leaf from the tree, the hyssop is blown to
the whirlwind;
Waste is the vine and the flower decayed — can the dew
now revive them?

Yea, when the trumpet sounds, when the banner at last is
uplifted,

Then shall the dead arise? The dead awaken and tremble?

1899

Nina Salaman.

Logos.*

O, prophet fling a glowing coal of fire
 From off thine Altar, cast it to the tewed
 That they may roast their meat upon il, stir
 Their cauldron, warm their palms;
 And fling a spark from out thy heart to burn
 The cigarette they smoke;
 illumine the crafty smile that, thieflike lurks
 Beneath their lips, the cunning in their eyes;
 They come and go these fiars; on their tongue
 The prayer which thou has taught them.
 They share thy sorrow, and thy hope they hope,
 They raise their soul toward thy ruined altar
 And, hastening to the wreckage, in the heap
 They rummage, picking out its shattered stones
 To use for floor tiles or the garden fence
 Or set as tombs on graves.
 And if they find thy heart, scorched 'midst the sherds
 They'll throw it to the dogs.
 O stamp upon thine altar, stamp in rage,
 Beat down its fire and smoke,
 Blast with one sweep the spiders' webs spread out
 Like harp-strings o'er thy heart,
 For thou hast weaved a song of life from them,
 A vision of salvation — vain the burden,
 Deceit upon the ear.
 Fling them to the winds; over the worlds waste places

* This and the following poems were written in protest against the assimilation of Russian Jewry, especially the Jewish youth, to all that was evil in the political life round them at the period of the Russian Revolution (1905).

Rent, shining they shall float
At end of summer on a warm, moist day;
No silver thread, no web shall find its mate,
And they will perish on the first wet day.
Thine iron hammer, shattered by much beating
In vain on hearts of stone,
Break piece by piece, and make therewith a spade
To dig a grave for us;
And speak the curse that God puts in thy mouth,
Lel not they lips know fear;
Thy word may be bitter as death, even death
Itself, we'll know and hear.

L.V. S.

Behold the night — the shadows gather round
And we go stumbling forward like the blind,
A something crossed our midst — no man knows what,
And no one speaks and there is none to tell,
If now for us the sun arose or set,
Nor if he set for ever,
And all around is chaos, black and vast
And refuge there is none.
And if we cry aloud and if we pray —
Who hears us?
And if we fling an awful curse abroad —
On whose head will it fall?
And if we gnash our teeth and clench our fist —
Whose skull shall start in twain?
The void will swallow up, the wind will waft away,
They perished once before — will perish thus again.
No strength, no stay, we cannot see the road,
The heavens are dumb.
They know they sinned against us, grievously,

And bear their sin in silence. . . .
Unclose their lips, O prophet of last things,
And hast thou words, then speak!
Though bitter they shall be as death itself,
No matter — only speak!
Shall Death affright us? nay, his angel rides
Upon our shoulders, and his bridle drags
Our mouth incessantly. . . .
And with the risen corpse's ghastly smile,
The gambler's hideous glee,
For ever do we move toward the grave.

1904

Helena Frank.

אכן גם זה מוסר אלהים

God's chastisement is this and heavy curse:
That you shall cast away your own live heart,
Wring out your sacred tears beside all waters
And string them on the first false thread of light,
And pour your spirit into alien marble,
And in the stranger's rock entomb your soul.
While still the raven's teeth are in your flesh,
Your soul too shall you fling to him for food.
And you shall build him Dithon, aye, and Ramses,
With living bricks — your own and children's children.
And when the child-soul cries from out the building,
The sound shall die away before it reach you.
If one among them grow a strong-winged eagle,
For ever shall you scare him from the nest,
And should he, thirsting for the sun, mount skyward,
The light that he shall bring is not for you.
His wings may part the clouds and free the sunlight —
It shall not fall on you.
Far distant shall he soar above the crags,
His scream beyond your hearing. . . .
When thus you shall have spurned your best ones from you,
One after another, you shall sit bereaved,
Your tent despoiled, all beauty fled your dwelling,
A dread and desolation to be seen.
God's blessing nevermore shall cross the threshold,
Salvation's joy stand tapping at the window.
And when you turn to pray, the words shall fail you,
To weep — the tears, because your heart shall dry
And fade and shrink — a garland from the vineyard
That withers in a corner of the winepress.
The sap shall never visit it again,

The wine that bids the drooping heart rejoice,
And yields refreshment to the languid soul.
The hearthfire, when you crave it, shall have died,
The cat mew loudly in the chilly ashes. . . .
And you shall soon wax grey and moody — round you
The endless sadness, and within you, nothing.
Your eyes shall seek the dead flies in the window,
The spiders in unswept and empty corners,
And misery shall whine within the chimney,
The housewall shake to ev'ry passing tread.

1905

—————
Helena Frank.

קראו לנחשים

The Curse of the Desert.

Summon the serpents to spread your wrath to the ends of the earth. . . .

For lo! you were borne to the desert and yoked to the bare scorched rock

Eternal the nakedness round you, the silencing bane of your God.

Weaned from the breasts of the ground, the bosom of earth and its scent,

You forgot how the meadows appeared, the smell of the fields after rain,

The strength of the forests eternal, the music of waters and streams,

The shade of the life-giving tree, that for ever is sapful and green.

When the fruit of your soul is decayed, its remnant of blossom and stem,

When the thorn is your food and you lick the flint of the rock in your thirst,

Your prayer shall be hissing of adders, your hope — the expanse of the waste.

When your eye has grown weary of gazing at the bareness of heaven and earth,

A place where is nought for your sake to gladden the heart or the eye,

A place where the hand of your God is angry, His eye dark and troublous,

So that never a soft cloud passes, nor ever a light breeze blows,

Then in turmoil your life will decay, naked and rotten in all,

You will ask for yourselves that you die, and cry out through
the pangs of your life.
Call to the eagles to bear your cry to the heart of the
heavens. . . .
Behold! Now your desert is visited, visit of breezes and
winds
Stirred up from the ends of the earth, heralds with tidings
of life,
A flock of light clouds bearing rain, joyous to meet them who
hope,
Bearers of life from afar, refreshing the thirst who yearn.
In their bosom there slumbereth the storm and before them
there pranceth a flame,
Swerving round peaks of the rocks, and leaping o'er crags
of the cliffs:
Then the clouds shall reach you and the lightning advance,
it will flash in your eyes,
And the storm be awakened and quivering suddenly break
o'er your heads;
The desert will tremble and quake and the rock 'neath your
feet will be shaken.
Then, astonished and trembling you'll rise, smitten with
blindness and awe,
Cast from the light into gloom and plunged in one instant
in both;
You will spread out your hands to the clouds and your eyes
will be longing for rain;
But the clouds, the blessed clouds will pass on, e'en as they
came pass away,
Having left you the laugh of their storm, but taken their rains
to far lands.

Barren and withered you'll stand in the desert with thorns
and with stones,
On your lips a last prayer will fade, like a backbitten curse!
Then you'll ask for yourselves that you die, you will rot in
the sweat of your lives.
Call to the clouds that they bear your grief to the expanse of
the seas. . . .

1906

The Talmud Student.

Still, in some hidden towns of our Dispersion,
 There smoulders on, concealed, our ancient light,
 In cities where our God a remnant spared,
 As 'twere a glowing coal amid the ashes,
 Where, like a plucked-out fire-brand, faintly smoke
 Weak human lives, poor souls of small account,
 Who live without a life and early wither
 Like blades of grass upon a thirsty land.
 And sometimes, when you walk abroad by night,
 In some such little city blest, while stars
 Twinkle above your head, and all around
 The grasses whisper, and the winds tell tales —
 You hear the distant murmur of a voice,
 And see behind a pane a distant gleam,
 And then a figure like a corpse's shade,
 That rocks and wavers, bending up and down,
 With moaning chant — a rush of broken thoughts
 Is borne to you upon the waves of silence.
 A Talmud Student, prisoned in a Kläus
 And keeping nightly vigil, you behold.
 Within those walls, not one day, but six years,
 Have watched his toil — his childhood ripened there
 Too soon, his youth matured there ere its time,
 His eyes were darkened and his face grew white.
 Not one day, but six years, have passed since first
 He turned him to the wall in that dark spot.
 No sunshine has he looked on, only cobwebs,
 Only the wall, daubed with untempered clay.
 Hunger and vigils, leanness and decay —

What are they, that his mind should dwell on these?
He surely knows how students lived of old,
He surely knows his day of fame will come.
Time, in six years, visits with news of change
Even that stagnant quagmire, a Yeshibah!
His children too have longing human hearts
And dance upon two feast-days in the year.
The building's very walls rock in the wind,
Benches are taken, benches are fetched again,
And students leave and other students come.
Some go to spend the Solemn Days at home,
Some spread to neighbouring villages and there,
Delivered from the dread Superior's eye,
Disport themselves beneath the kindly roof,
Where pride and pity wait such learned guests.
And some have been expelled and leave in haste
And sadly to their fathers these return.
But one remains, stuck faster than a nail!
Events and years pass him behind — unseen
Before him there is nought, save evermore
The same blank wall, his corner and his books.

Since first he took his place there, no recluse,
No scholar yet, has seen him come or go.
The beadle even has not marked the time
At which he comes, at which he makes for home.
The morning star, the moon, the gloom of night,
They only know his hours, for e'en the sun
Knows nothing of his ways, nor e'er beheld.
And early, early, ere one may define
'twixt bluish thread and white, "'twixt wolf and dog,"
And when from out the soundless depths of night
The latter stars in mustered myriads shine,

What time the townsfolk sleep their closing sleep,
Before a cock-crow even breaks their rest,
Ere even those most pious Jews arise,
The last watch who forestall, to serve the Lord,
When all creation speechlessly awaits
The rising to new life, as though it dreamed
Its closing dream and hid beneath its wings
Secrets and charms, the while its sleeping face
Is veiled in silence, all emotion hid
Beneath the dusky folds, the "Mathmid" wakes
And straightway rises from a brief repose,
And dresses in the dark and seeks his corner.
The roving winds alone have heard his step,
His hasty step along the garden path
That leads to the Yeshibah, while above
The stars keep sentinel along the way.

Then it may happen, that the frolic wind
That blows light-hearted out of heaven's blue,
Tempts him with Satan's blandishments, uncurls
His earlocks, whispers, fills his head with fancies.
The young man's eyelids cling and seem to beg:
"Have pity, brother, on your two dim eyes
That spoil beneath us! we are tired, have spent
Ourselves for thee, for thou hast made us toil
All day, a summer's day! and then throughout
A night-watch — brother, we are done to death!
Turn back, lie down, rest, and let us rest too,
E'en ere thou sleepest, we shall be renewed." —
But suddenly he passes his thin hands
Across the clinging lids, as though to brush
Such thoughts away, and down the empty street
Resounds once more the echo of his tread.

Then the wind lights upon the garden grass,
Whispers, entices with its murmuring sound:
"Behold, fair youth, how verdant is my bed.
Enjoy, before thy breath dissolve away!" —
"We also sleep," the grasses and the herbs
Lisp dreaming round him, and the stars above
Take up the tale: "We sleep — with open eyes."
And from the pleasant hay-fields comes a scent
That steals into his nostrils, makes him drunk.
A wave of air comes flooding to his lips,
Enters — a lightness fills his throat and breast,
He opes his mouth, inhales the air, makes loose
The shirt unfastened round about his neck,
Like some poor quarryman dislraught with toil,
His inmost being begs and prays for rest.
He stretches to the wind his helpless hands
As crying: "Take me, carry me away!
Hence let us flee and we shall both find rest.
Here I am cramped for room, and I am tired!"
But sudden contact with the garden hedge
Tells him his feet have strayed and he recalls
His duty and his corner, and as one
Who flees from sin, he hastes to the Veshibah....
Within, a holy stillness fills the space
Empty as yet, and he first drinks it in.
His comrades three await him in his place,
They, who have been his friends since first he came:
The burning light, the desk, his Talmud text.
He hastes to join them, like to one who hoards
The nimble seconds, and begins to learn.
Once at his desk — the nail is hammered in!
All day and half the night he'll stay, and there

For very hunger, swallow his black bread.
O flint and iron! when the Jewish boy
Has taken to the Torah, where are you?

And thus the youth keeps steadfast to his seat
From break of morn till midnight, for his day
Has four divisions, whereof only one
Is for himself, while three are for the TORAH.
As one alone, cut off from friends, and tied
Fast to his corner, white-faced, wrinkle-browed,
A lifelong captive of his own accord,
On the Gemara still he shapes his soul.

"Oi, oil" the Rabbis taught: ". . . if I shall offer
Body and life upon the Torah's altar,
I shall be heard, maybe, from out my corner,
And see my fame shine forth across the land. . . ." .
"Oi, oil" the Rabbis taught: ". . . Rabbi Akiba
Was simple and unlettered forty years,
Then entered a Yeshibah and became
A glory of his folk, and I — am young!
My God, take what Thou wilt, my flesh and blood!
I've sworn by Thee and by Thy holy Law
My lips shall move, my voice shall cry, I will not
Stir from my place, my corner, and my heart
Shall know no rest, my eyes no sleep, until
Thy word has quenched my thirst, the Morning Star
Shall wake me, midnight lull me, till I know
The Talmud and am learned in the Torah!"
So, once more: Raba said . . . the Student's voice
Borne by a strength sublime, rings out anew. . . .
Methought that high above the Ark there shone
A transient gleam, as though a Saint should smile.

The Holy Presence in the Scholar's breath
*Delights . . . or else, she mocks the sacrifice
Of buried lives, that in a narrow prison
Deny themselves, heroic, for her sake? . . .
And now the sun has sunk into the night,
The light above the Ark is upward caught,
And voices fall yet lower, till they seem
More like the hum of bees, the buzz of flies. . . .
At last the beadle comes, and calls to prayer. . . .

Minchah is quickly ended, and the lads
Disperse into the street, they seek the fields.
The youthful limbs, youthful in name alone,
Cry out, they seek the valley, wherein grow
The ruddy apples and the ruddier maids.
The heart o'erflows with joy, the lungs expand,
The wind is low and cools with gentle touch,
And dries the sweat from creased and saddened brow.
Within is silence, the Yeshibah's walls
Are sunk in gloom and stillness, and of all
Her scholars, only two recluses pale
Remain behind to talk of trivial things.
And now, a voice has broken forth again,
A turtle-dove coos loudly in his corner. . . .
What is the sore heart crying now? And what
The burden of his melancholy strain?
Maybe he now recalls his dear, good mother,
His needy father, pines and feels the heart
Throb like a captive bird within his breast
For longing to behold their face again,
As day by day, afar, they in their prayers
Repeat his name, and hope for him and wait

* Refers to a sentence in the Talmud.

As for Messiah, till he come indeed,
The Torah's diadem about his brow. . . .
The wrestlings of a boy's heart who can tell?
But ever, when the pious pass that way,
And bend an ear and stand, the while his voice
Pierces the severing wall with ringing tones —
The old ones linger and commend his choice,
And pray within their heart a silent prayer:
"Happy the son who gives him to the Torah,
And happy those who nurtured such a son! . . ."

"Oi, oi," said Raba: ". . . and thou hearest not,
Even in whispers, what the living voices
Are crying round thee, boy, their speech to thee
Is meaningless as thou wert deaf and dumb."
"Oi, oi!" said Raba: ". . . and the soul, that cries
Daily through thy hoarse throat against the wrong
Done to the budding of its manly strength,
The sapping of its youth, thou hearest not,
Stoppest thine ears and shuttest out its prayer,
Each needful craving crushing out for good,
Stifling the germ of every humblest wish,
Uprooting every flowerlike aspiration,
Till, tired at last with its own weary cry,
With thirst unquenched and unfulfilled desires,
It fall asleep, a starved and withered thing,
That never was beloved and never loved."

And those two eyes of thine, for seeing made,
That might have viewed the earth and all her wealth,
Are spent and darkened, have as yet seen nothing,
Have nothing wished to see, and fade already,
And spiderlike, along forsaken paths —

And shadowlike, among the dead, thou gropest. . . .
For what were they created all in vain,
And why in vain shall they be lost, these souls?

Sometimes the student wonders at himself,
Disgusted at his toil and seized with anger.
In winter, when the cold and tempest reign,
When heaven is like a smoke and earth is dull,
When faint, dark clouds trail weeping o'er the sky,
"Oh, that the sun would but light up her face
One little moment, if she would but make
A slender offering of pallid light!"

From somewhere a green spider comes, to pitch
Her tent within the corner, where the gloom
Is doubled, and the chambers of his soul
Are filled with chill and trembling. Then the youth
Feels in himself despoiled, forgot, forsook,
Feels that his strength is weak and weary grown,
The flame that burnt within him nearly spent.
His voice is like the sighing of a soul
That droops to death, the moaning of a heart
Trampled upon like grass, that only heaves
With bitterness and Prayers of Supplication.
His recitation is a bitter plaint,
Art thou in love, dear child, with pain and grief?
Unhappy boy, dost thou not know thy state?
Unhappy? why unhappy? Who can prove
That man was born to comfort? On what plea
Is he to quarrel with his wretched corner
Where he has standing-room?
The Torah, wide and shining, still illumines
The dark, sad regions she has ever sought.

God's hand from out the darkness took and gave her,
A heritage of light, from age to age.
In caves, on roof-loops, sat our children, there
They learned by stealth, until from out the caves
Came guides to light our path and from the roofs
Descended Sages — this, because the Torah
Is fathomed only by a life of grief,
And by afflictions have we been sustained.
Why should the youth regret it, that to him
The earth and all its fullness is denied?
Two whole Sedarim, ordered well and kept
Upon his lips — just think, two whole Sedarim!
The other students envy him, they have
A presage of his better days to be.
Two whole Sedarim — oh, how blest his lot!
And shall he not rejoice? He holds already
The guerdon of his toil, by all around
The Mathmid and 'Ilui he is called.
The priestly brow bore but one golden plate,
The ruler wears one crown of finest gold,
One wreath befits the hero and the poet,
While on our Student's head there shine two crowns!
The Mathmid, the 'Ilui both are rungs
High on the stairway of the Torah set,
But few steps higher the Geonim stand.
How many have been worthy of such fame?
And he hopes on, for still the bloom of hope
Has secretly refreshed his downcast spirit,
And compensation showed for stolen youth,
And knit the Student's heart to love his corner.
Like one who, sharpening iron, sways and bends
'Mid flying sparks, above the whirling stone,
So whetteth he his brain in yonder corner

Upon the stony problems of the Talmud.
On winter evenings, when, in likely mood,
With some dark passage wrestling he prevails
That wrought oppressive on his fevered brain,
He sees again the day that brings him home,
The Ordination safe within his pocket,
Authorities and Talmud in his head,
His fame there spread abroad, his parents' joy,
The envy of his comrades and his friends
Unto this day dissembled, and his name,
A lightning flash from Mir to Volozhin
While he is blest and praised as a Gaon.
He a Gaon? The prophecies come true?
Well, then: said Raba . . . "Oi, oi," Raba said. . . .

"The more he dreams, the dearer to his heart
His narrow corner and the broad Gemara,
His toil and pain and hunger, and his voice
Breaks out with might — yet whence the bitter note,
The suffocated sigh that wrings the heart,
Hidden and twined in the Gemara song?
No one, but he who passes the Yeshibah
At night, or in the stillness of the dawn,
Who sees the lighted window and who hears
The lonely voice, the wakeful Mathmid's chant,
That pours out low before the hidden spirit
All its sweet bitterness, its bitter sweetness . . .
He only knows with what a fiery dart
It wounds and rankles, that Gemara song!"

I also in my youth have heard these voices,
Have watched these toilers, seen the wrinkled brows,
The heavy eyes, the pallid face that seemed

To beg for mercy — and each look and line
Told me of stifled feeling, sparks crushed-out,
Each look and wrinkle stirred the best within me.
And rent my heart and wrung my inmost soul . . .
But when I call to mind their voice, their voice,
That waits like that of wounded men forgotten,
Lord of the world! I cry within myself,
On what were all these lives, these powers spent?

My fate hath not so willed that I with you,
Unhappy ones, should lose myself — I parted
From out your company, transgressed for bread,
And walked and lost myself in other paths.
The times have changed, and far now from your border
My altar-stone is reared, my tent-pole set,
And still I think of you, each one, each one!
Your forms are with me, clinging to my heart,
Recalling still how vigorous the seed
Hidden within your luckless plot of ground,
And what the treasure which it might have brought
Had but a ray of sunlight warmed the soil,
What sheaves we might have reaped, had but a gust
Of generous air blown o'er you — had the road
Which leads toward the Torah, which we so
Neglected and despised, been cleared and plain!
How pitiful and bitter is your end!
Oh, woe is me for you, my hapless folk.
How parched the lot, and blasted how the portion,
Wherein such grain could moulder and decay!

1894-5

Helena Frank.

בעיר ההרגה

In the City of Slaughter.*

Of steel and iron, cold and hard and dumb,
Now forge thyself a heart, O man! and come
And walk the town of slaughter. Thou shalt see
With waking eyes, and touch with conscious hands,
On fences, posts, and doors,
On paving in the street, on wooden floors,
The black, dried blood, commingled here and there
With brains and splintered bone.
And thou shalt wander in and out of ruins
Of broken walls, doors wrenched from off their hinges,
Sloves overturned, dilapidated hearths,
And singed beams laid bare, and half-burnt bricks,
Where axe and flame and iron yesternight
Danced a wild dance and led the bloody revel.
Then, creep to attics, clamber over roofs,
Peep in where all the black and yawning holes
Appear like ragged wounds that neither wait
Nor hope for healing more in all this world.
Outside, the sultry air is thick with feathers,
And thou shalt think to wade as in a river,
A flow of human sweat, the sweat of anguish.
Thou stumblest over heaps of goods and chattels —
They're just whole lives of men, whole lives of men,
Like broken potsherds, past all mending ever —
Thou walkest, runnest, fallest in the wreckage,
In cushions, tinsel, linings, silk and satin,
All dragged and rent and torn to bits and trampled —

* From the Yiddish of Bialik's version of his Hebrew poem written after the Kishinev massacres.

They're holidays and Sabbaths, joy of feast-days —
 And scarfs and prayer-books, parchments, scraps of Torah,
 The white and holy wrappings of thy soul.
 Look, look! they fold themselves about thy feet,
 They kiss thy very footmarks in the dust . . .
 Thou fleest! whither? back to light and air?
 Run, run! the sky will laugh thee, man, to scorn!
 The sun will blind thee with his glowing spears,
 Acacias hung with tassels white and green
 Will poison thee with smells of blood and flowers,
 And blooms and feathers fall on thee in showers.
 A thousand, thousand shivered bits of glass
 Shall twinkle in thy dazzled eyes — behold!
 For now is given thee a wondrous thing,
 A twofold gift, a slaughter and a spring!
 The garden blossomed and the sun shone bright,
 The Shochet* slaughtered!
 The knife was sharp and glistened, from the wound
 Flowed blood and gold.
 Thou seek'st the shelter of a court! in vain!
 A heap of refuse. They beheaded twain:
 A Jew — his dog, with hatchets, yesterday,
 Toward the centre of the court. This morning
 A hungry pig came by and dragged them hither,
 And roused, grunting, in their mingled blood.
 Let be! to-morrow there will fall a shower
 And wash the blood into the drain, and stifle
 Its cry to heaven for vengeance; some, maybe,
 Has sunk already deep, deep down, and feeds
 The thorny tangle of a crooked hedge.
 And calmly, like to-day and yesterday,

* Heb. = butcher.

The sun will rise to-morrow, in the East,
Its splendour not diminished in the least,
And just as nothing were, pursue its way . . .
Go, half distraught, and scramble to a garret,
And there remain alone in musty gloom.
Alone? the fear of death is breathing round thee!
It fans the dark with black and chilly feathers
And lifts each single hair upon thy head.
Look, here and here, and in between the rafters,
Are eyes and eyes that gaze at thee in silence,
The eyes of martyred souls,
Of hunted, harried, persecuted souls,
Who've huddled all together in the corner,
And press each other closer still and quake;
For here it was the sharpened axes found them,
And they have come to take another look,
And in the apple of each staring eye
To glass once more the picture of their end,
Of all the terror of their savage death,
Of all the suff'ring of their dreary lives.
And, trembling like a crowd of startled doves,
They flutter in a cluster to the ceiling,
And thence they gaze at thee with dumb, wild eyes,
That follow thee and ask the old, old question,
The one that never yet has reached to heaven,
And never will:
For what, for what? and once again, for what?
Yes, crane thy neck . . . behold, there is no heaven!
There's nothing but a roof of blackened tiles.
Thence hangs a spider — go and ask the spider!
She saw it all, and she's a living witness,
The old grey spider spinning in the garret.
She knows a lot of stories — bid her tell them!

A story of a belly stuffed with feathers,
Of nostrils and of nails, of heads and hammers,
Of men who, after death, were hung head downward,
Like geese, along the rafter.
A story of a suckling child asleep,
A dead and cloven breast between its lips,
And of another child they tore in two,
Thus cutting short its last and loudest scream,
For "Ma-", was heard, but "Mame" never finished.
And many, many more such fearful stories
That beat about thy head and pierce thy brain,
And stab the soul within thee, does she know.
And, stifling down the sob within thy throat,
Thou rushest headlong down the stairs and out —
To see again the world of ev'ry day,
The usual sun, outpouring unashamed
A wealth of beams at every guilty threshold,
And lavish of its store on worse than swine.

Descend into the vale where smiles a garden,
Where in the garden stands a silent shed.
As though they slept upon their sleeping victims
Like vampyres drunk with blood,
Behold a heap of cartwheels piled together,
And bent and broken, splashed with blood and marrow.
And some there are with open spikes that point
Like murd'rous fingers clutching at a throat.
Yet wait without! When fiery and bloody
The sun has set beneath the western sky,
Then steal thee thief-like back into the shed,
And fall a prey to terror . . .
To terror! see, it hovers in the air
And clings about the walls and soaks the stillness.

Hush, listen well! the wheels begin to move,
 Torn shreds of limbs are live again beneath them,
 They twitch convulsively in blood, their own, they anguish.
 A quiet groan, a rattle in the throat
 Of one not killed outright, a last low sigh,
 A smothered scream, and then a grind of teeth.
 All this is there alive beneath the wheels,
 And fastens on the beams and on the rafters
 And squeezes in at ev'ry crack and hole,
 Or else hangs midway in the shudd'ring air,
 A canopy above thy sickened head.
 A speechless woe, because beyond all words,
 Trouble and sorrow infinite . . . but hush,
 There's some one else beside thee, slowly feeling
 His way in darkness and with closed eyes.
 And, sunk in great abysses of distress,
 He stretches out before him two thin hands
 Toward the depth obscure, alive with fears,
 And probes the darkness with his ten blind fingers,
 But seeking for no outlet . . .
 'Tis he, 'tis himself, the voiceless Spirit
 Of Pain, a captive of his own accord,
 And one who, pitiless, condemned himself
 To endless ages of unuttered woe.
 And hov'ring in the shed around you twain
 Is Nong-venòd*, the Homeless One, who rests not,
 And never finds a corner on a foothold,
 A sable Presence, weary, deathly weary.
 O pitifull 'twere fain to weep, and cannot,
 To give one cry, but one, and still is silent,

* Heb. נֶגְוֶנֶד Seiu nong-venòd — a Yiddish expression = to
 be wandering from pillar to post.

And chokes and struggles, with the tears unshed,
And spreads its pinions o'er the slaughtered martyrs,
And hides away its face, dissolved in sorrow,
And weeps within itself without a language.
Hush, go thou softly now and shut the door,
And eye to eye remain with it alone,
And let its burning wrongs and aching griefs
For ever interpenetrate thy soul.
When all within thee 's died away to silence,
Go, touch its wounds, and they will live and speak.
Then bear its woes' remembrance in thy breast
To all the confines of the whole wide world,
And seek a name for them, and find it never . . .
Now go without the town when none may see thee,
And steal thee softly to the place of burial;
And stand beside the martyrs' new-made graves,
And stand and look and let thine eyelids fall —
And turn to stone.
Thy heart shall fail within thee, but thine eye
Burn hot and fearless as the desert sand.
Thy mouth shall ope to shriek aloud for vengeance,
And dumb as are the tombstones shalt thou stand.
Go, look and look, behold them where they lie
Like butchered calves, and yet thou hast no tear
To give to them, as I have no reward.
For I have hither come, O ye dead bones,
To beg of you, forgive me!
Forgive your God, you that are shamed for ever!
For all your dark and bitter lives forgive me,
And for your ten times dark and bitter death!
For when you stand to-morrow at my threshold,
When you remind me, when you ask for payment,
I shall but answer you: "Come, see, I've nothing."

It cries to heaven, I hear it, but I've nothing.
For I am poor myself, I'm beggared also.
And woe and woe and woe is all my worlds!
Lel all the seven heavens moan for pity.
To bring such sacrifices all for nothing,
To live such lives and die such deaths for nothing,
Not knowing to what end, for what, for what!
Her head enwrapped in clouds, my old Shechinah
Shall sit for evermore and weep for shame;
And night by night I too will lean from heaven
And mourn myself upon your graves.
The shame is very great and great the anguish,
And which is greater, say thou, son of man!
No, best keep silent, be a speechless witness,
Nor testify with words to having found me
In poverty and having seen my woe.
Yet, son of man, departing take with thee
A portion of my sorrow and my care,
And mingle it with wrath and cast it from thee
To fill the lap of corpses still alive.

What now? go back and gaze on leaves and grass?
The fresh and fragrant message of the spring
Steals in upon thine heart and there awakes
A longing for a new and freer life . . .
The grass is grave-grass, man, and smells of death.
Tear out a handful, fling it down behind thee,
And say, with closed eyes:
"My people is as grass plucked up, and how
Shall that which has no root revive and live?"
Come, look no more, come back to those yet living.
To-day 's a fast-day, come where stands the Shool,
And plunge thy soul in tears, their sea of tears.

Thou hear'st the lamentations and the moans
From open mouths, from out between locked teeth.
The rent and quiv'ring sounds, like things alive,
Unite, and — hearken! now they rise again
In one despairing wail of misery,
That tosses still between a damp, dark ceiling
And upturned faces all awry with pain.
A sudden horror chills you to the bone:
Thus wails a people only that is lost,
Whose soul is dust and ashes, and their heart
A scorched desert. . . .
No root of hatred, not a blade of vengeance,
For hark, they beat the breast and cry, Ashamnu! *
They pray of me forgiveness for their sin.
Their sin? the sin of shadows on the wall,
The sin of broken pots, of bruised worms!
What will they? why stretch out their hands to me?
Has none a fist? And where's a thunderbolt
To take revenge for all the generations,
To blast the world and tear the heavens asunder
And wreck the universe, my throne of glory?

And hear, thou son of man!
When next the reader cries upon the platform,
"Arise, O God, avenge the slaughtered victims,
Avenge thy holy ones, the pious greybeards,
The suckling children, God, the little children!"
And all the people cry with him together,
And when, like thee, the very pillars tremble,
I will be cruel to thee, very cruel,
For thou shalt have no single tear to shed;

* Heb. = we have transgressed.

And should a cry arise in thee, I'll choke it,
Between thy teeth, if need be, I will choke it.
I will not have thee mourn as do the others.
The tear unshed, that bury in thyself,
Deep down within thy heart, and build a tower
Of gall and hatred round it; let it lie
A serpent in a nest (and men shall suck
And pass its venom on),
With thirst and hunger still unsatisfied.
And when the day of retribution comes,
Then break the wall and let the serpent out,
And like a poisoned arrow shoot it forth
With hunger raging and with thirsty fang,
And pierce thy race, thine own race, through the heart!

To-morrow, son of man, go pace the street:
Behold a market full of living ware,
Of bruised and beaten, half-dead human cattle,
With bent and twisted backs,
Of skin and bones tied up in rags,
Of maimed and crippled children, and of women
All fagged and parched, and these,
Like locusts or the latter summer flies,
Besieging doors and windows, ev'ry gateway,
And stretching out crooked hands with fest'ring wounds
(The hands have only lately learnt to beg),
And crying each his merchandise of woe:
"A groschen for a wound, a groschen for a wound!
A groschen for a violated daughter!
A groschen for a grandsire done to death,
And for a son, a boy just ripe for marriage!"
Go, tramping pedlars, seek the field of victims,

And dig white bones from out your new-made graves,
And fill your baskets, ev'ry one his basket.
Go out into the world, and drag them with you,
From town to town, wherever there 's a markel,
And spread them out before he strangers' windows,
And sing hoarse beggar-songs, and ask for pity!
And beg your way, and trade as heretofore
In flesh and blood, your own. . . .
Now flee, O son of man, for ever flee,
And hide thee in the desert — and go mad!
There rend thy soul into a thousand pieces,
And fling thy heart to all wild dogs for food!
The burning stones shall hiss beneath thy tears,
And stormy winds shall swallow up thy cry!

1903

Helena Frank.

על השחיטה

On the Butchery.*

Heavens! Entreat for mercy in my name,
If there's a God in you, and to that God
A road I have not found —
Speak prayers in my name!
My heart is dead, upon my lips no song
Of prayer; strength has failed, hope is no more —
How long, till when, how long?

Headsmen! Here's my neck — come, strike it through!
Neck me like a dog, the axe is in your hand,
And all the world's my block —
And we — why we are few!
My blood is gratis — smile, let flow the gore,
The blood of babes and greybeards stains your coat —
'Twill never be wiped o'er.

If there is Right, then let it now be shown!
For if when I have perished 'neath the skies
The Right shine forth, I pray
Crushed ever be its throne!
And through eternal wrong the heavens shall wilt;
But walk, ye recreants, in your violence;
Live in your blood sans guilt.

Cursed be the man who cries, "Vengeance for this!"
Vengeance for this, — the blood of little children —
The devil has not framed.
The blood will pierce the abyss,
To the gloomy depths the blood will worm its way,
Devour in darkness, gnaw upon the earth's
Foundations in decay.

1903

* At Kishinev, Easter 1903.

ידעתי בליל ערפל

A Dirge.

I know I shall fade like a star on some dark night,
No star will know my grave;
But my wrath shall still smoke on like the crater's mouth
When the flame has died away,
And live among you when the tempest howls
And waves on the ocean rage.
Ah! Would that your great sorrow might be treasured
In the bosom of the world,
To moist the plains of heav'n and fields of earth,
The grasses and the stars;
To live in them, inspire them, grow old
And young with them, to fade and flower again,
And nameless, formless, homeless, stand till the end
A witness of your shame;
And with mute cry to Heaven and the grave
Gainsay that the world be saved.

Then, when false justice sheds its trustless light
At last upon your slain,
And over your murderers a banner of lies
Stained in your blood waves flauntingly at heav'n,
And the forged seal of God impressed thereon
Assaults the radiant sun;
When proud-stepped dance and shout of treacherous feast
Shake up your martyred bones —
Then, tremulous, the azure firmament
Will darken for your grief,
The sun be scarlet as your guiltless blood,
With the brand of Cain on the forehead of the earth,

And badge of defeat for the broken arm of God;
Thus star to trembling star: "What tragedy!
What cruel treachery!"
And the God of vengeance wounded to the heart,
Will rise with a shout — go forth with His great sword.

1904

ב ש ד ה

In the Cornfield.*

No, not like a bird that escapes from its cage with a song,
And not like a lion that leaps from the gloom of its lair,
But more like a hound men have chained and tormented for long
I slink from their sight, and depressed to the fields I repair.

O'er valley and hill, yonder twinkle the white little houses
Wherein they both slumber and waken in peace and content,
They toil and they prosper, they see a reward of their labour,
I gaze from afar and my heartstrings with longing are rent.

I stand and I list to the voice of the Lord in the corn. . . .
Why whispers the wind as though with a message 'twere
fraught?

And why do the ears wave their full, golden heads in a dream,
And why do the little blue flowers seem heavy with thought?

I stand in the corn with the rustle of ears all about me,
I feel like a skiff on the swell of a billowy sea.
The trees of the forest are waving their boughs in the distance,
Green boughs full of secrets . . . I stand and I listen and see.

I fall to the earth and I bury my face in her bosom,
And pour out in tears all the pent, bitter grief of my heart —
"O earth, mother earth, to me, to me only, denying
Thy bountiful gifts, why stand I thus shamed and apart?

All's silent . . . the sun has dropt away down by the hill.
Waited in on each hand by the stalks, my way homeward I wend
The skies are light blue overhead and all sunlight around me
The fields of the corn stretch away without limit or end.

* From the Yiddish version of T. J. Schwarz.

The clouds faint and fleecy, are travelling high in the azure,
They creep and they gather and throw down a shade as of
night,
They darken the cornfield — and lightly a wind has arisen
And sways down the ears as they dream in the shadow and
light.

. . . A silence, a gust, and the ears one and all
Have bowed to the earth as in dread,
And far, far away like a quivering flock,
Like terrified sheep they have fled.

A rustle and sweep from the hill to the valley,
A shudder of flight o'er the plain,
A rush and a thrill and who knoweth its meaning?
A tremor half sweetness, half pain.

O ears of the corn, whither, say do ye flow
And billow away out of sight?
So swift that ye cover the bird on the wing
In your magical, whispering flight?

O whither away? where the clouds float above you?
To fields by no winter despoiled and shorn?
To lands whither tendeth the soul in her dreaming,
O golden ears of corn?

The wind is laid, all's still — the heavy, golden ears
Stand bent and sunk in a dream as they stood ere the wind
came by,
But the other winds in my breast have kindled a smouldering
fire,
And up through the flying ash the flame burns fierce and
high.

I stand and gaze at the field, the beautiful, mirthful, rustling —
I feel how poor I am, there's a thought that eats at my brain:
Not I broke up the soil and strowed the seed in the furrows,
Not I, not I shall garner the wealth of the ripened grain!

Not mine was the prayer to God for the warm and gentle
showers,

Not mine the drops of sweat that fell from the toiler's brow,
Not mine the joy of heart while the ears grew daily fuller,
Not mine, not mine the song when they put in the sickle now!

And yet, for the sake of the land of our fathers

Where, filled with a hope new-born,
My brothers are binding their sheaves now with gladness,
I love you, O fields of the corn!

1894

Helena Frank.

מתי מדבר האחרונים

The last Corpses in the Desert.

"Moses dies and Joshua leads".

Up, wanderers in the wild and come away!
Long is the journey yet and long the fray.

Enough of roving now in desert places —
There lies a great, wide road before your faces.

But forty years of wandering have sped,
And yet we leave six hundred thousand dead.

Deplore them not! unwept let those remain
Who fell as slaves, let us tread o'er the slain.

Dishonoured let them lie, across the pack
They bore from out of Egypt on their back.

Sweet be their dreams of garlic and of leek,
Of flesh-pots wide, of fatty steamb and reek.

Around the last dead slave, maybe to-night,
The desert wind with desert beast shall fight,

And joyously to-morrow's dawning shine
Upon the firstlings of a mighty line,

Upon a generation who shall brook
The sun's full splendour with an upward look.

Rise wanderers in the wilderness come out!
With step assured, yet neither cry nor shout,

And lest the sands with all their sleepers start,
Let each man's footfall sound but in his heart.

Let each man in his heart hear God's voice say;
"A new land's border shalt thou cross to-day!

"No more the quails from heav'n no more light bread —
The bread of toil, fruit of the hands, instead.

"No more wild tents pitched under heaven's dome —
Another kind shall ye set up for home.

"Beneath His sky the wilderness outside,
God has another world that reaches wide,

"Beyond the howling desert with its sand
There waits beneath His stars the Promised Land."

On Nebo's mount, against the setting sun,
Like war's great angel, stands the son of Nun,

Thus fiercely beautiful — like shaft from bow
To rouse the marshal of his host below

His voice goes forth with strength, his word like fire,
And e'en the awful waste, the desert dire,

A thousandfold re-echoes it and cries:
"Go up, inherit! Israel, arise!"

A lion's restless young ones in their pride,
Thus Israel's multitude on every side

An awestruck silence kept, while loud and dread
The voice resounded o'er the people's head.

The trumpet signals for the start are blown,
From Nebo's summit Joshua comes down.

Why march not Israel forward now, but still
Remain with faces turned toward the hill?

What moves them in this desert to regret?
Why look they on the vales of Moab yet?

What mean the tears that flow from every eye?
On Nebo's mound whose form would they descry?

'Twas there that Moses died with one accord
Fall prostrate on the sand the mighty horde,

Before his spirit bow ere they depart,
Their great, dead shepherd of the faithful heart.

1896

Helena Frank.

מקראי ציון

The Zionist Delegates.

Woes of your people summon you from far
Corners of exile, and their bitter cry
Has roused you; great the wonder brought to pass;
The tear breaks from its faithful fount — the eye,
Big with sweet pearls and warm, 'tis seen
Unburdened, after vigil keen.

Sure now the thronging waters stifle breath,
Evil has gained the eye's own lodgement place,
Our cry has rent the very heart of Heaven,
The grave is calling by our side for grace . . .
Whose heart leaps not in dread to greet
You, bless from far the hour you meet?

From ends of earth no anthems have you brought
But ancient dirges, new upon each morn,
To shew your people in the sight of sun
Tossed in their blood as waves on water borne;
They rise, they fall from trough to crest,
Whose heart with dread shall not be stressed?

'Tis good our tears in unison should fall,
Flow from the ends of exile to one urn;
Redemption fails, but our Redeemer liveth,
To come with that great hour for which we yearn:
Last left for dust shall then discern
You pioneers of our return.

And in our annals, full with tales of grief,
Shall be a treasured pearl — your sacred tear;
Who hinge the doors and set the gables, they
Will know whose hand has laid the head-stone here.
Your mem'ry in dark hours shall rest
A ne'er fading sun to the oppressed.

1897 (on the occasion of the First Zionist Congress at Basel).

At Sunrise.

Awake with the sunrise! Clamber on the hills
 To find the gold orient,
 And being first to greet the sunlight, each
 Will quaff to his soul's content.
 The dear morn of God like a sapful fresher goes
 Around you, and o'erflows;
 For all the aged and withered in your heart
 Its sunlight will revive,
 And all idolatrous and vile therein
 The morning star will thrive.
 Guard ye the golden treasure hid away
 As succour for your heart.
 Ye who approached, burdened with sin and care,
 Guiltless and rich will part.
 O! ye decrepit, rotted of the night,
 Pray for the sun — the light.
 Moist with dew of blossoms ye'll return
 And deck with mantle green
 Each one his friend, and each in his father's house
 Will tell of the wide demesne.
 Then in the fields ye will strew the stars to play
 On the children's heads to-day.
 Descend to find in the dark
 Your brother low and stark,
 The light will tremble, teaning on his heart,
 And lips pressed softly ope:
 "Rise, brother, pray, for there is room for prayer,
 And a place for hope — come hope!"

Then he will awake — your friend of yesternight —
And thirst for the sun — the light.
If ye, in search for sunlight, found but void,
Go, fashion it from nought,
Hew it from crags and quarry from the rocks,
In cells of the heart be it sought.
And when the God of light draws back the veil
'Twill spread and never fail;
Your waifs will come anew
To lift their soul to you
And in your bosom they will lodge desires
Sacred — to their sons impart
This herilage from age to age command:
"Live, stint no toil, take heart!
"Weaned from the darkness, drawn from the breasts of night,
Clasp to your head the light!"

Kishinev 1903.

מתי מדבר

The Dead of the Desert.

"Come and I shall show thee the dead of the desert!"*

'Tis no herd of lions and whelps that covers the eye of the plain,
Nor the glory of Bashan, brave oaks, that have crashed lo
their fall, mightily fall.
By the side of their scorching black tents lie giants stretched
out in the sun.
They crouch on the cold desert sands, lionesses are crouching
secure;
The sand sinks away 'neath the place where the bodies and
bulk of bone lie.
The mighty are clinging to earth, deep in slumber; their
weapons are by,
The quiver and scabbard on bell, and their javelins stuck in
the sand.
Heavy with locks are their heads, with great coils they have
drooped to the earth;
The hair of those locks is drawn long, like to the lion's shaggy
mane.

* Rabbi bar Barchanah met an Arab in the wilderness who said he would show him the generation of Israelites who left Egypt for the Promised Land before the Mosaic exodus and died by the way. The Arab led the Rabbi to the resting place of these dead of the desert. The knee of one of the corpses was raised, forming an arch and the Arab rode under it with his lance at full tilt without touching it. The Rabbi took a fringe from the garment of one of them but found he could not move away from the place. The Arab asked him if he had removed anything from the corpses, and if so told him he should return it, as all who took anything from them were transfixed motionless. The Rabbi returned the fringe and was able to proceed on his way.

Their faces are tanned with gaunt strength but their eyes are
as tarnished as brass,
Targe for the sun's bright arrows and sport for the strong
hot wind.
Hard are their foreheads and daring faced to the heavens and
staring.
Fear dwells in those brows and a devil lurks in the cave of
each eye,
The rings of their beards are tangled to mazes of serpent
slrife.
Fashioned or moulded of flint they rear their breasts forward
sublime,
Projecting like anvils of iron, set for the hammer to strike,
As if they were hardened for ever with blows of the hammer
of time,
Or by wielding of fathomless power, forged and then silent
for all.
The scars on those faces of terror, the wheals on those
breasts laid bare,
The script of arrow and spear, the writing imprinted of
swords,
They alone, as engraving on pillars of stone, tell the eagle
descending,
Of spears that were countless but broken, arrows shattered
when shot from the bow,
Hurled on those rocks that are hearts, on the face of those
tablets of quartz
The sun rises, the sun drops away, while the hundreds of
years roll by,
The desert is calm, bursts to storm, then the silence steals
back to its place.
The far-away crags nod their heads, as they ponder on
ancient times,

Proud with the silence of kings in loneliness' grandeur and age.
For miles upon miles all around not a voice not a murmur, —
no sound.
The wilds have engulfed for ever the shout of those mighty
men,
Their tread that disturbed the waste and their steps have the
winds swept away,
Casting over them hillocks of sand, and the rocks have
grown up in their place.
The desert has stopped their life breath, lulled their valour
for ever to sleep.
The blast is devouring their strength, and their glory
congealed in the waste.
Burning heat of the sand for their pillows has beaten out
flames from the rock.
The flame and the fire of the sun are caught in the mirror of
spears,
And reflected as thousands of sparks on the faces like copper
that shines.
Unveiled to the heat of the sun, generations have perished
away.
The wind in the east saps their strength, it is scattered in
blasts from the south,
Borne as dust to the dust of the dust of the earth, that pigmies
may tread with their feet,
And dogs with their tongues lick the dust of strength timeless,
the rot of their power,
They lick, and they wipe from their mouths; — with no thought
of that lion manned race
Who fell and were silent for ever on gold desert sands.

Now the fall of a shadow in diving scans over the sand of the plain,
It comes to the edge of the camp of the corpses, and hovers aloft,
Swooping and turning in flight, warping and weaving in circle;
Of a sudden it lingers o'er one of the bodies exposed — and it slays;
And the body and half of the next is dark with the shadow above.
A shock rends the air to its centre, a flapping of wings and a fall!
He drops the full weight of his body, falling at once on the prey;
Tis a great limbed son of the rocks, an eagle, hooked beak and curved claws,
The vulture's quartz talons are over the flint of their breasts pointed beak
Nosed against rigid faces — — —
In a moment the eagle stoops down on the corpse, iron scrapes upon iron.
But the carrion cruel, on a sudden, sheaths his weapons again with affright,
In dread of the silence of kings, and the glory of slumbering might;
And spreading his wings lifts him up, soaring in spirals on high,
Strikes out mighty waves in the heavens and shrieks at the pride of the sun;
High and aloft in the heavens, he hides in the azure skies.
For long yet there is trembling below, caught by the point of the spear,
A feather that fell from the eagle in flight but its bearer knew not;

There, deserted and orphaned, it waves in the light till it
drops to the ground.
And the stillness steals back to its place; undisturbed are the
mighty in sleep.
When the desert is fainting away in the heat of the noonday,
behold
Like the shaft of a wine press a viper, a great speckled asp
of the waste
Leads out the soft rings of its flesh to slither and bathe in
the sun.
Peradventure he writhes in the sand, or crouches all breath-
less and calm,
With softness dissolving away; in surfeit of brightness he
sports;
Or alert he expands to his length, drawing onward and on
toward the sun,
His mouth at its brilliance agape and his shimmering golden-
scaled robe.
Like a child of the desert delights he is tender and lone on
the plain.
Of a sudden the serpent springs forth, he slips from his place
and starts,
Writhing in stealth he glides, o'er the heat of the sand he darts
Till he reaches the camp of the corpses, then ceases his
hissing — and stays.
A third of his body erected — a column with symbols scored —
Domed head of gold crested aloft, extended his neck, eyes
aflake,
Scanning from end to end the camp of the sleeping foe;
'Tis a multitudinous camp, tale of corpses that has no end,
All their faces are bared to the vault, and the brows of their
eyes spell wrath.

Then the hatred preserved from the serpent of Eden till now
lights up
And it lives in the green and the glare, in the flame of the
serpent's eyes,
And a shudder of anger swells through from his head to his
quivering tail.
Lo! he prostrates from his height, and quakes with a tremble
of hisses,
Stretched like a weapon of wrath, o'er the backs of the slain
lying near,
And the viper's cruel head towers aloft, and the hiss of the
serpent mouth
Is heard, whence two black tongued fangs are trembling, with
anger aflame.
A moment — the serpent winces, about to retreat his head
With fear at the quiet of kings, and the glory of slumbering
strength
He recoils in his length to the rear, and turning aside slinks
away,
Sibilant, bounding and flashing, in dimless distant light;
And the stillness steals back to its place; undisturbed are the
mighty in sleep.

When the night of the moon floats down and rests on the
plains and the rocks,
And the wilderness draped, black and white, is hid but
unravels its eye,
Miles on miles of the sand and the plain are lost in white
ground of the light,
And the shadows are heavy which crouch at the side of its
crag, that are reared

Like some mythical beasts or monsters, the mammoths of
early time;
Ere the dawn goes up they silently steal to their world again.
The orb of a troubled moon looks down on the threefold rite —
The wilderness, night and the ancients, shedding a bashful
light.
And the desert is troubled, and dreams, cruel dreams of
eternal decay.
Soft is the wilderness moaning, heaving short sighs and long
groans.
Then it is that the lion of might incarnate and strength leaps out
With confident step and no fear, he comes to the camp and
slays still.
He raises his head of high heart and towers his mane crowned
neck,
And his eyes are two soft, still embers, that spy on the camp
of the foe;
And the camp is a far-flung camp, and the silence is great
therein,
The mighty asleep hold their silence, none moving a hair or
a lid;
They seem to be bound with black straps, bands that are
shadows of spears;
The moon blanches the strength of their faces, the darkening
brows of their eyes.
And the lion has paused there to marvel at the glory of
slumbering might.
Hark! A reiterated knocking — the lion roars,
And for league upon league the desert and its outskirts are
quaking afar,
The echo falls and spreads forth o'er the rocks and the
silent hills,

Shivered to thousands of sounds on the edge of the distant
waste.
The jackals respond to his cry and the hoot of the owls gives
him answer,
The neigh of the wild ass rises, and the desert is filled with
dread;
Is it not the howl of the wilderness, the bitter cry of the waste,
That tosses in pain for 'tis weak and hungered, its soul is
parched?
The lion waits yet a moment to ponder the sound of his might.
Then he turns from beside the corpses, but calm and with
wonted pride,
Lifting his feet and pacing, a flame of contempt in his eyes,
He steps gravely and, shaking his mane, king in splendour
is gone far away.
For long yet the desert is angry and tossing it finds no rest,
It sighs in its sickness and groaning takes chastening with
heart of ill grace.
Dawn — and 'tis weary of moaning, with restlessness sated
and wrath
It sleeps, or half waking it weeps as the furies of dayspring
strike fear.
The eye of the moon is waning, and the rim of the heaven
grows white,
The shadows creep back to the mountain sides, there to melt
away;
The rocks, grey and wrathful appear, their renown stills the
tremulous waste,
It fumes in its breast yet a moment and pants, but no murmur
is heard;
As the sun climbs up it is silent — — 'tis the silence as ever
it was,

The strong lie as ever they lay — — and aeons on aeons
roll by.
At times will the desert awaken and gird at the calm ever-
lasting,
It bestirs to avenge itself then, take revenge for its waste on
its Maker,
It lifts itself 'gainst Him in storm, insurging in columns of sand,
And rises to hit the Creator, strike dread on His glorious
throne;
It dares to repour divine anger, to throw it with ire at his feet;
Heaping its turmoil on God, with Chaos restored to its reign.
The Creator is wrathful and quaking, the face of the heavens
is changed,
They are canopied over the desert, 'tis a bowl of iron at white
heat,
And there issues from them the blood anger, the red of the
vision breaks forth
On the space of eternity, flames to the top of the kindled
rocks.
And the desert is bitterly wroth and panting, shakes, tossed
to its depth.

All the nethermost parts of the grave are mingled with peaks
of the world;
The lions and tigers blown round in the wheel of the whirling
wind
Are storm-rent, their manes stiff with fear, roaring thunder,
their eyes shooting sparks
They seem to be floating in air, confounded, perplexed.
In that hour,
Seized with a fever of valiance, the mighty of dread awake
That race bold and mighty bestirs, the race that is mighty in
war,

Their eyes are as lightning, their faces are flame —
With their hands to their swords
Are the warriors thundering forth with the voice of the six
hundred thousand,
The shout rends the storm, with the groan of the desert in
anger it vies,
And the tempest beats round them, and round them is anger. —
They shout:

‘Warriors are we!
Last in the era of bondage,
The first to be free.
’Tis alone our strong hand
That has ripped from the pride of our neck
The weighty yoke band.
Our head is exalted to heaven,
In our sight, it is small,
We have roamed in the desert, the waste,
“Our Mother” we call.
On the crags of the rocks, in cloud reaches
We have quaffed from its spring
Freedom, with eagles of heaven;
What lord is our King?
And if an avenging Almighty,
Shuts His desert, around
We have our revenge, for a song
Of revolt we can sound:
To arms! To lances: Fall in:
To the right, — form!
’gainst the ire of the Heavens in wrath
We’ll advance, through the storm!

We are here, to advance!
If th’ Almighty denies us His hand,

And His ark will not move from its place,
Let's go forward without it, on chance!
'Neath His wrathful eye in the angry
Lightning of his gaze
We'll conquer the peaks of the mountains
And armed foes amaze,
Attend!
For the storm itself calls: 'Make the assault!
To arms!
To lances! The hills must be shattered,
The mountains rent,
Or our corpses shall tumble in piles,
We are here! To th'ascent!'
Who could conquer the desert in power, when dread voices
ascend in the storm?
'This nought but the desert in turmoil, a cruel, bitter chance,
full of terror.

Calm and clear is the waste; light illumines the heavens, and
silence is great,
And caravans stay'd by the whirlwind rise from their knees
to bless God;
Spread out on the sand as before are the six hundred
thousand of corpses,
On their faces the Light — it is death that maketh their peace
even with God.
No man upon earth knows their place, the time when they
fell, when they rose,
The storm has heaped mountains around them and shut them
for ever away.
But perchance a bold spirited horseman withdraws from a
caravan train,

Sel spurs to his towering steed and dives through the sea
of the plain;

Tight on his charger's saddle, he flies with the wings of a bird,
Hurling forward his lance he catches it up in the speed of
its flight,

It seems that he hastes with the lightning, coursing before him
away,

And he, leaping after, grasps hold, then sets it to freedom
again.

In the far has the vision faded, but the steed sweeping
onward, lifts high

Its rider to peaks of the mountains, pillowed on cloud. All
at once

The charger is trembling, it curvets and rears itself backward
in fright,

The horseman, is puzzled and shading his hand o'er his eyes
peers afar,

Then wheels on his steed of a sudden, the terror of God on
his face,

Urging his charger with strength, like an arrow sped forth,
speeds away,

And regaining his caravan, whispers to friends what his eyes
have beheld;

The Arabs give ear and look mulely from one to another,
amazed,

They enquire of their elder about it, and he is one holy and
wise.

The sage one gives utterance and says "O thou faithful, let
Allah be praised!

"By the beard of the prophet thine eyes on the dead of the
desert have gazed.

"'Tis God's camp, 'tis a race of the ancients who gloried in
power of old time.

"Theirs indeed was defiance of soul; they were hard as the
rocks of Irak;
"They embittered the life of their prophet, and even 'gainst
God they rebelled,
"So He closed them about with the hills, lowered sleep ever-
lasting above,
And commanded the desert to guard them, a monument there
for all age,
"His faithful may Allah withhold from touching the hem of
their robe!
"It is told of an Arab who took just one thread from the
fringe of a cloak,
"How at once all his body dried up till the guilt was restored
to its place;
"The ancestors they of the people of the Book."
Thus the sage one declared;
The Arabs give ear and are dumb, with Allah's own fear on
their face,
As they tread along slow in the tracks of their camels, to
weariness laden,
And for long yet there gleam from afar the white turbans they
wear on their head,
And the humps of the camels pass slowly to fade in the
distance clear,
As if they were bearing away on their backs yet another old
tale — — —
And the stillness steals back to its place, and the desert
stays childless.

Odessa 1902

A Sabbath Hymn.

The setting sun upon the oak tree tops doth lean,
Come let us all go forth to meet the Sabbath queen,
For, lo, she cometh down in holiness and blest,

And with her are angels —

A host of peace and rest.

Welcome, O queen

Welcome, O queen

Peace be upn you, O angels of peace.

We have welcomed Sabbath with joyous song and prayer,
Now let us homeward turn, our heart's no gladness spare,
For there is laid the table, the candles are alight,

The house is shining —

And every corner bright.

Blest Sabbath of peace

Blest Sabbath of peace

May your coming be peaceful, O angels of peace.

Abide with us, O purest, illumine with thy ray
A night and day to follow, and then pass on thy way;
And we shall show thee honour with garments choice

With three good meals — [and fair

And table-hymns and prayer,

With quiet complete,

With rest that is sweet,

May you bless me with peace, O angels of peace.

The setting sun upon the oak tree tops doth lean,
Come; let us all escort the parting Sabbath queen;
"Peace on thy departure, O sacred pure of reign,

Six days we wait

Till thou shalt come again. . . ."

For the Sabbath to come,

For the Sabbath to come!

May your parting be peaceful, O angels of peace.

